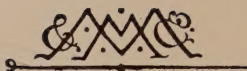


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The beacon

THE WIDECOMBE EDITION
OF EDEN PHILLPOTTS'S DARTMOOR
NOVELS IN TWENTY VOLUMES

VOLUME SIXTEEN
THE BEACON



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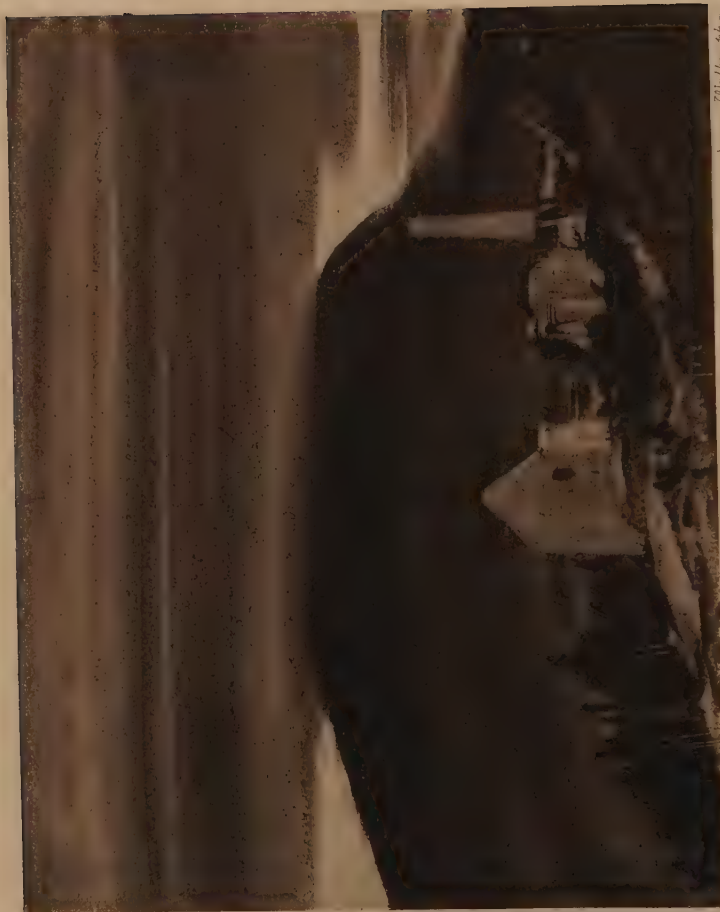
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FRONTISPIECE

BY CECIL HUNT, R.W.S.

“Springing directly from the marches, with never a foothill to break her northern steeps, Cosdon, that great frontier height of Dartmoor, almost assumes the contour of a mountain.”



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THE BEACON

BY
EDEN PHILLPOTTS

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1928

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CHAPTER I

SPRINGING DIRECTLY from the marches, with never a foothill to break her northern steeps, Cosdon, that great frontier height of Dartmoor, almost assumes the contour of a mountain. High Willes and Yes Tor, Fur Tor, and Great Mis soar nearer to the blue, and ascend above all earth piled southerly of Snowdon, while other hills and uplifted wastes of the tableland are only a little lower than they; but Cosdon Beacon's arc, seen featureless against the southern sky, arrests and challenges among the needles and turrets of the tors by reason of its distinction and its might.

From Hoga de Cossdonne, when the third Henry reigned, there set forth trusty perambulators to define the bounds, metes, precincts of the Royal Forest, and all future topography of the district was built upon their labour. Mediæval monuments are few upon this hill, but the neolith has left many a still enduring stone.

A river skirts the western faces of Cosdon; while to the south she breaks into lesser hills and flows out by the undulations of Metheral, Hound Tor, and Kennon upon midmost Moor. Eastward her approaches to the land of farm and fallow are also gradual, for there lie the great swamp of Raybarrow and the Commons of Throwleigh and

Tawton; but northerly she leaps sheer aloft, flings off a forest like a garment and towers to her high places.

Earth holds no deeper loneliness than that upon a mountain's summit. Such secret spots are hidden from the valleys and the lesser hills; the shoulders that sustain them know them not. They appear only to the noonday sun, to the full moon and the southing stars. Cosdon's high top is thus sequestered, and from it the prehistoric people, with bonfire or balefire, sent messages of good or evil through the night to the Beacon's giant kindred of the four quarters. Their tidings leapt, flame on flame, from the cressets of Buckland and Pen to the sea, by Kit Hill and Carrodon to Cornwall, over the barrows to Exmoor, to Dunkery and the Mendips. So flashed the fall of Troy to Agamemnon's queen—'Joy's herald, through the darkness gleaming.'

Yet Cosdon's immensity is apparent rather than real; for Nature has built her, rounded her and ordered her uprising with such cunning architecture that the hill's dimensions, in their perfection of proportion and balance, imply an amplitude that they do not possess. The mount attains to a sublimity and asserts a vastness beyond man's senses to refute, though within the measuring-rod's power to deny. So human achievements, in the lifting of stone on stone, depend not upon size for their glory or height for their fame. A Parthenon—that marble song of victory and gratitude—dwarfs to dust the mightier temples of succeeding ages.

Little brooks gush out from the hill to swell larger rivers beneath, and there are many water springs within her; for armature she has the

granite; her vesture is the great and lesser furze, brake fern and heath. Marsh flowers adorn her and the fragrant shrub that haunts water. Her jewels, the sphagna mosses, make light by spring and mire; they gleam, there in emerald and pale gold, here with orange and the colour of red wine. Cotton grass nods its pearls, and the seeding rush enriches every bog with russet and tawny.

Incarnate Cosdon and her body belongs to light rather than darkness. Unlike some abodes of eld she has a heartening, welcoming genius within her. She offers a tonic and a discipline from her high places; her severity is serene; her own obedience to Nature she exacts again from all things. She does not brood or repine; she murmurs of no pain, nor laments her ages of endurance.

She is the haunt of earliest and latest light. She welcomes the dawn and echoes dayspring from her crest of cairns; she signals back to the sunset its final fire; she treasures the earliest tremor of the foreglow, and of the afterglow the last. In high summer she scarcely sleeps, but records on her grey crown the faint pulse and glimmer of the sun creeping northerly under the hills upon his way to the east. She hides herself indeed, but it is in light oftener than darkness that she hides, and then, having communed with grey and silver mists, or the depth of storm clouds—dark by comparison with the upper air, but all light against her own purple bosom—forth she comes again, and unfurls and emerges out of her hidden hour, as a vestal from vigil. She is not austere but simple; there is a homeliness about her, a rough and drastic understanding, an elemental shrewdness. The mother-wit of mother

earth belongs to her; nor will she be found wanting by the creatures that creep or fly to her and call her home.

Certain epichorial legends, as of dancing stones and the Black Hunter, belong to the Beacon; but no particular stories have been gleaned; her history is not knit into local folklore and traditions, and she has no special sanctities. And yet we may find her a close if unconscious influence on many lives that have been and are to be: we imagine her as the eternal companion of our race—a creature that was before we were, that will persist long after we are not. We may regard her as a very symbol and index of endurance, and cannot feel that she is pervious, penetrable, perishing as the animated dust that peeps about her.

Nevertheless she, too, sinks surely; and though man fails to mark it, as he fails to mark the passage of the stars, or their altered relations, or their diminution of fire upon the firmament, yet every moment leaves sensible impression on the Beacon; and at the last her might and permanence amount to no more than the sun-set dance of midges by her water-ways or the melting glitter of a snow crystal on her forehead. Cronos devours all his children indifferently, and this gracious hill offers another crumbling testimony to the truth that matter alone is eternal, but no form of it; that the stars of heaven and the mountains of earth are but sparks and smoke before the face of everlasting time.

CHAPTER II

A BARMAID in a small London hotel, wearying of life among streets, sought to change it. One frequented her place of service, and he came from Devonshire and was familiar with the county. He fired her mind with tales of its beauty, so that, when there came from the west country an offer of such work as she was contented to do in the world, she made application and gained the post.

Elisabeth Densham was twenty-three, and save for two brothers in Canada and a sister, a waitress in a London eating-house, she possessed no near relations. Orphaned at sixteen she had fought her own battle against some odds. But Sarah Densham, who was ten years older than Elisabeth, had helped to steer the younger by strait paths. She was clever, thoughtful and of a high spirit. She cared for reading and possessed some imagination. She and her sister had been born in the country, and, while the elder desired not to return to it, Elisabeth now felt glad to do so.

She was upon the way and sat at the window of a third-class carriage on the South-Western Railway. The train had carried her from Waterloo, and would presently bring her to Okehampton.

She was dressed in a dark-blue skirt and jacket,

and wore beneath the latter a blouse of white linen. At her throat was a little pearl brooch, and her straw hat was perched on a mound of dark-brown hair. This beauty she wore divided into three portions, of which two were brought about her ears, and the third spread upon the crown. The carriage was hot, for it had roasted all day under an August sun. She wiped her face presently, and then fanned it gently with her pocket-handkerchief. She had pale brown eyes of the colour of honey, and they were the home of light. Their peculiar tone challenged the sunbeams and echoed a warm glint, that she was soon to see, where moorland pools are penetrated by the direct ray and flash it back again. Her eyebrows were wonderful and arched true as the bow upon the cloud. They were dark and a little heavy, but, since her face showed much strength of character in the chin and lips, they were not too heavy, and their perfect form and steady pencilling prevented any suggestion of the irregular or unguarded in her character. She had a well-shaped mouth and a round, beautiful chin, wherein a dimple dwelt. She looked too pale, but her skin shone clear and promised to grow warmer when brought into communion with the sun and the wind. Her facial charm lay not in repose, but when she smiled sheer loveliness belonged to her in the opinion of discerning spirits. It was, however, the elusive loveliness that fires the connoisseur. Commonplace minds did not always admire her.

And now Elisabeth was come to the good red earth and gazed on it with wonder. Then Exeter appeared and disappeared. She reached Yeoford and guessed that her journey must be nearly ended.

"Excuse me, please," she said, and rose and filled the window for a moment.

Then she returned to her seat and her strong little hands, in white thread gloves, folded upon her lap again.

An educated man sat opposite. He had entered the train at Exeter and admired her. He spoke to her now that he might hear her speak.

"Were you expecting anybody at Yeoford?" he inquired as the train proceeded.

"I thought, perhaps, that I might get a glimpse of the Dartmoor hills. I'm coming down to a place called South Zeal that's close by them."

"Look out again!" he said quickly. "Look straight across the valley before the train gets into the cutting."

She leapt up and made her eyes small against the great light.

Here were elms upon broad meadows, and then woods and the glint of kerning corn, that challenged the sunlight and rippled to the wind upon a gentle hill. Beyond, a heat-haze danced and the country rolled away into close perspective dimmed by distance and drenched in the splendour from the sky; while at the horizon a small shadow, like a blue mole-hill, rose—a mere hillock under the brightness of golden cumuli that towered their mighty heads beneath the throne of the sun.

"Where's Dartmoor, sir?" asked Elisabeth.

"Yonder," he said, and pointed. "That's Cosdon Beacon."

The train sank between green hedges, and the traveller fell back with disappointment on her face.

"My word! 'Tis nothing at all!"

Her fellow-traveller laughed.

"You mustn't look in the sky for our little hills, unless you stand under them. But sometimes distance doesn't lend enchantment. Don't be cast down. Cosdon's a good big lump of earth when you are there. Nothing is absolute, you know; nothing is real. Everything only seems. Nature's full of tricks like that; and we copy her and make believe too, don't we?"

He chaffed her and admired her eyebrows, but she looked puzzled and drew the inner corners of those beautiful arches a little closer together.

"The hill's a long way off, I suppose?"

"A few miles. You climb to the top to-morrow. Then you'll understand it; and you'll measure South Zeal better from the top of Cosdon than you will when you're in it."

Here she followed him.

"I understand that," she said.

"Yes. From Cosdon you'll mark a smudge down below, like the skeleton of a trilobite flattened out—backbone, tail, head, all complete. The field hedges stretching away to right and left are the ribs, and the village is the carcase. And the truth of Zeal, if we could only get at it, might lie nearer the trilobite skeleton than what we think about it. Perhaps it's only a dead thing really. But nobody will ever know the truth of Zeal."

She smiled doubtfully, but barely glimpsed his meaning.

"I'll tell you what I think about the truth if you like," he said, rattling nonsense to watch the play of her face. "My belief is that there's no such thing. Absolute truths couldn't contradict absolute truths, could they? Yet who has found

out anything so true that nobody doubts it? There's nothing so certain that everybody believes it."

She showed interest and reflected.

"There's death," she said.

"Good heavens! What an instance! Why, the soul of man cries out louder against death than any other fact of Nature. Immortality—who wouldn't cling to it if he could? Death is doubted by everybody. I'm sure you don't believe in it a bit."

Cosdon appeared again now. It had grown into something respectable. It shone with the misty bloom of the grape, and flung itself up nobly above lesser hills.

At Okehampton station a brisk, young-looking man with a clean-shaved face appeared before Elisabeth.

"You'll be Miss Densham I reckon," he said slowly. "I know most of the people on the platform, but you're strange."

"That's right," she answered. The accent of the county, and the great deliberation of this particular native interested her.

"Hope you've had a good journey, I'm sure. My name's Ned Startup. I'm first driver to the Oxenham Arms, and I've come to fetch you. Where's your box to? I'll put it in the wagonette, and you can sit up alongside me if you mind to."

"I should like that very well."

"We go through Okehampton, and I've got a few places to call to pick up things. The wedding be coming near now. 'Twill be a great event, of course."

Elisabeth's little yellow tin trunk was put behind in the body of the carriage and she sat

beside the driver. An old grey horse then started on his return journey, while Ned chatted and told her about the country and the places of importance. They climbed the great hill from Okehampton, sank to Sticklepath, and so passed presently to a little hamlet that was to be the newcomer's home.

Before they had gone very far Ned Startup warmed to Elizabeth, enjoyed her company and appreciated her ready understanding of his points and jests. For there was something in her voice, responsive eyes and sympathy that made men seek a closer intimacy and feel she would not deny it. Yet when youth desired to become personal, or middle-age showed a tendency to grow silly, she chilled them alike, and had the art to leave them not angry with her, but with themselves.

CHAPTER III

THE THATCHED ROOFS of Zeal fall in steps from west to east, where the village lies upon a hill. First comes a row of white-washed cots, with white-washed walls between their gardens; then a little inn appears and other dwellings under tar-pitched roofs. Half-way down the descent, Elisabeth marked a small, dark, limestone house, solid, stern, and new. The walls about it shone white or rosy, and their thatches were moss-grown and full of genial colour; but this dwelling was different. It looked grim as a torpedo-boat moored in a fleet of mellow-sailed fishers.

"That's Abraham Pike's house. Him as rents the limestone quarry and has a finger in other pies beside. A terrible curious man. 'Twill take all your time to please him when he comes for his evening drop."

Mr. Startup explained other objects of interest as he drove slowly down through the village to where stood the Oxenham Arms, the stateliest and most ancient abode of the hamlet.

In the midst of Zeal rose a graceful cross above four crooked steps. It lifted with a long stalk and short arms, and the road divided here to right and left, leaving the cross and an open space and a little chapel together in the midst. A shining clock beamed from the chapel, and the hands

moved over golden figures; while above, two exposed bells hung together in a tiny turret, and at times twittered thinly like birds, to call the people to prayer.

The village was quite soaked in sunshine. Zeal basked happy as a lizard beneath Cosdon's uplifted heights. It lay like a nest in the hollow of a desert place, and the sun burnt into it and lighted the cottage faces and blazed in the little flower-gardens by the way and cast deep purple shadows between the cots to make cool places for the children to play in and the dogs to rest.

Elisabeth took joy of this vision, but Mr. Startup warned her.

"'Tisn't always so," he said. "'Tis all mucks and mire half the year. However I be glad 'tis favourable for your coming."

"And that's the Beacon?"

"'Tis so—a very queer old place up top. Then across t'other side you see Red Wheel Copper Mine—they chimneys and machines and puffs of steam on that high broken ground yonder. And down to the bottom of the village there's a stream and a tree or two and a few small inns. But nothing to our inn as we'm just coming to. And northerly lies old Pike's famous quarries, and South Tawton and the church. Be you church or chapel, miss?"

"Church," she said. "What are you?"

"Church, for certain. We all go somewhere—or say we do. Not but what a man here and there scoffs at it, like Reynold Dunning for instance to Clannaboro' Farm. But we'm mostly of some persuasion."

He drew up where an old sixteenth-century building stood with deep porch and oriel windows.

A tar-pitched slate roof, that undulated like running waves, crowned the ancient place; a great archway opened to the stables at one end, and before the entrance was a granite porch of fine proportions, where winter weather or summer sun might be escaped. As she entered, a cool freshness touched Elisabeth's forehead and welcomed her. A draught blew straight through the dwelling. She heard a voice cry out:

"She's come, Tom," and then appeared two figures—a man and an old woman.

Tom Underhill, master of the Oxenham Arms, advanced, took off his hat, and shook Elisabeth's hand; his aunt, who approached behind him, waited to dry her hands on her apron before doing the same. The man was very fair and ruddy, with a face like a boy's, and a great frame bulking large enough to fill his own spacious portal; the woman had equal breadth, but she sloped like a hill from her head outward. From neck to breast, from breast to stomach she expanded. She revealed a pendulous chin with little tags of hair upon it. She had a manlike voice and man-like opinions, save in her comprehensive contempt for man.

"This is Miss Cann, my aunt, who's helping for the minute till I'm married," explained Mr. Underhill. "She'll show you your room. There's a rotten board in the floor of it as you'll have to mind. I be going to have it mended in a minute, but along of my coming marriage there's a few things have got to wait. Now you shall look in the bar, if you please. My aunt will make tea, and no doubt you'll be glad of it. Here's the bar parlour this side, and our big room for public meetings and dinners

and audits and such like is up over. The skittle alley's behind and——"

"Shut up, Tom, and go about your business," said his aunt. "Come with me, Miss—what's your name?"

"Elisabeth. But you'll call me Lizzie, I hope."

"I shall do. I ban't one to waste breath; haven't got none to waste for that matter. Here's the bar. 'Tis a very fine bar, as you can see. How long it will bide so under my nephew I can't tell."

The newcomer regarded her theatre of work with a professional eye. It was strangely small after the London bar, but it was bright and sweet, fresh and cool.

"I like it," said Elisabeth.

"So you should. 'Twas all planned and thought out by a very clever man. My late brother, in fact. Then he was carried off by a carbuncle in his neck, just when he'd got all shipshape and spent an ocean of money. And then my nephew gave up a small place, at Throwleigh village, a few mile from here, and took up this. But he's one of them 'do it to-morrow' sort of men. He would have put off being married, only the girl weren't that sort. But now 'tis to be. In fact Friday week's the day. You like the bar?"

"I do like it. Mr. Underhill won't mind if I arrange things my way?"

"Mind? He was never known to mind in his life. But his wife's different. I fix my hope on her and you. I trust you be made of pretty tough stuff?"

"Yes, I think I am."

Miss Cann nodded.

"You girls behind the bar see what they are."

When Fanny Cann used the word 'they' she indicated the male sex, and when she said 'us' she always implied her own.

"There's all sorts—good and bad—here like everywhere else, I suppose," said the younger.

"All sorts, mostly caddling, worthless creatures. Be you tokened or anything like that?"

"'Tokened?' What's tokened?" asked Elisabeth.

"Engaged to be married."

"No, I'm not."

"Not a friend?"

"Not in that sense," she said.

"Well, don't be in no hurry. There's a lot of miners and small farmers and quarrymen and such like here. But they'm all rubbish. Now I'll fetch you up to your chamber, and then us'll have some tea. 'Tis a queer old place and I'm frightened of my life to move off the ground floor, for fear of bringing down the stairs, or one of the ceilings. There's a lot wanting to be done in the matter of rats and rotten wood that my brother meant to do; but whether Tom will ever carry out anything till a floor lets him through and breaks his neck, I can't say."

Elisabeth laughed.

"He's a very fine man."

"A big size in boots, I grant you; but a terrible small size in hats—like most of 'em about here. This is your room, and I see Ned and Nelly haven't fetched up your box yet. I'll hurry 'em."

Miss Cann lumbered away and Elisabeth looked about her. It was a pleasant little chamber facing upon the street. White blinds covered the

window; the floor was bare and still damp after scrubbing. A rag mat of many colours lay beside the bed. At one end extended boards perforated with worm holes, and a piece of paper was pinned to the wall above with these words in a large sprawling hand:

"Keep off here!"

Somebody knocked at the door. Then Ned Startup and a maiden entered with the box between them.

They put it where Elisabeth directed, and Startup introduced the girl. She wore a long blue apron over a print frock. Her face was bright and high coloured, her eyes and hair were black. The latter was drawn back and tied in a bunch on her neck. She was tall and well favoured.

"This be Miss Densham, Nelly, and this be Nelly Joep, our shoemaker's daughter. She works here and we be keeping company."

The girls shook hands.

"Hope you'll like it, I'm sure," said Nelly. "'Tis a funny little old place and will seem terrible wisht after London I should think."

"I shall like it for certain."

Nelly gave a short laugh.

"Me and Ned would go to London to-morrow if we could," she declared.

Presently Lizzie drank tea with Tom Underhill and his aunt. They told her of the things that would concern her work, and she was surprised to learn how light it promised to be.

"I shall feel lost at first," she declared. "Of a morning you'll have to find a bit for me to do."

A bell sounded and Tom rose.

"The bar," he said.

"Let me go, then."

They went together to find a man at the counter.

"Hullo, Dunning! Don't often see you here."

"Good-evening, Tom. Not often. 'Tis a thought out of my beat most times. A pint of Burton, miss, please."

Lizzie drew the beer.

"This be our new barmaid—Miss Densham," explained the publican. "She've come along, so as she shall settle down afore I get married and go off for the honeymoon. She's a Londoner and doubts we don't know what work is here."

Reynold Dunning nodded.

"Some of us do; some of us don't," he answered.

He was a man near forty years old, clean shaved and featured like a Northern Indian, with rather high cheek-bones, bright hard eyes and straight dark hair. His face was handsome, his lips finely moulded and very firm. He was tall and slightly built. Grey already showed in his hair, but not sufficiently to discolour it. Dunning was a bachelor, and women liked him for his good looks and his masterful attitude toward the sex. He knew something about them, not because he sought them or cared for them, but because his was a nature before which they were prone to reveal themselves a little. He breathed masculinity and unconsciously they felt it and responded.

Many held him to be cruel. He was a farmer, and lived in the neighbouring hamlet of Throwleigh, at the eastern foothills of the Beacon.

He looked boldly at the newcomer.

"A change from London," he said.

"I want the country and I want hills," she answered. "I was told there were fine hills."

"Plenty of hills."

He finished his beer, paid for it, and went out without another word. A moment later he had mounted a bay horse and ridden away.

Lizzie laughed.

"Funny manners," she said.

"Yes, he's an odd man. Was disappointed in love they say, though none can prove it, for nobody ever knowed the woman, if woman there was. His ways be rather blunt like that. There was a girl lived at Throwleigh who cared a lot about him—a rich girl too, and he knowed it. And to church, one Sunday evening, she dropped her book in the aisle right under his nose as he was carrying round the alms-dish, and instead of picking it up for her, he kicked it pretty near to the altar steps and didn't turn a hair. But the poor girl very near fainted—so 'twas said. Though I believe she thought more of the prayer-book after that than all the rest of her possessions. That was in his church-going days when his mother was alive. But he gived up all that when she died. He lives alone with his head man and his head man's wife to Clannaboro' Farm, nigh Throwleigh. He's a terrible hard worker and fears nought. Makes lot of money, but 't isn't known that he spends it. He've got enemies. Abraham Pike of this place hates him worse than the Dowl. Both hungry as hawks for money, and the sparks fly when they meet, I assure you. But 'Iron' Pike, as we call him, be generally held to get out of it best."

"He's very good-looking however."

Tom laughed.

"There you are! Just like t'others. The women all bow down afore Reynold Dunning, and the men all wonder what the mischief they see in such a glum, short-speeched man."

He explained the contents of certain bottles.

"There's a good few old blades have their own taps of a night. Jack Joep, the shoemaker—that's his drink—Hollands he takes, and Pike has gin. His bottle's paid for on the nail so soon as it's opened, and he knows to an eyelash where the liquor ought to stand in it. Then his man at the quarry, Frank Madders—'Lucky' he's called. Lucky's bottle be there. We're all very friendly most times and give and take. Some of the miners from Red Wheal be a thought rough, but I never allow any coarse speech in the bar more than I can help, because I don't like it."

"I shall very soon get the run of everything."

"No doubt. You ask my Aunt Fanny if you stand in need of ought. I'm going out now to see Minnie—that's the young woman I marry next week."

CHAPTER IV

BEYOND THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP and the Binn of the Seven Stars there stands at South Tawton a great elm. Beside its foot are bedded a drinking-fountain and a pillar-box; behind it rise steps to the lich-gate of St. Andrew's, a fine old perpendicular fane with tower embattled and pinnacled, and a heavy, south-facing porch. A motto from Juvenal decorates the wall; about the open place before the door lie gravestones in the gravel and stands an ancient font of granite; the large yard is remarkable for the number of unrecorded dead whose mounds are scattered within it.

The bells were ringing for Tom Underhill and Minnie Burgoyne, and a thin stream of the folk threaded into South Tawton from the neighbour hamlet of Zeal. The life of Zeal was at doors and windows, and those who could not attend watched two carriages, with white horses and satin streamers on the whips, as they departed to church.

The guests went on foot, though a few, from more distant homesteads, drove. Among these was Reynold Dunning, who came from Clannaboro' with Noah Vallance, his head man, and Mercy Vallance, his housekeeper.

Many girls and young men went to the

wedding. They marched chattering along in Sunday best through deep, hot lanes to the throb of the little bells of South Tawton.

The girls wore blouses of bright colours and flaming hats. Elisabeth Densham and Nelly Jope came together, and with them walked a little black-eyed girl with dark hair—Nelly's younger sister, Emma. She was quick and alert as a mouse, humorous and clever for her age. She had the art to make men listen, though she was not seventeen.

A crowd of slatternly women, with children tumbling over them, collected at the church door. Each remembered a similar event when they had played heroine a few years before. Some were passive as sheep and stared stupidly before them; others laughed and chaffed and tip-toed to see the bride when she arrived.

In church presently assembled silent people clad in their best. These sought to be near the ceremony, but other men and women, in workaday clothes, kept at the back. A murmur of low talk persisted in the porch, where the four bridesmaids were waiting. They wore white dresses and blue sashes. Each carried a small bunch of sweet-peas and maidenhair fern tied with a pale pink ribbon. A row of young men just within the church kept attracting their attention and making them laugh.

Lizzie appeared with Nelly Jope and walked up the aisle. The young men openly admired her. She wore a white hat and white muslin over the body of an apple-green dress. On her breast was a white rose, and she had tied up her hair with a big black velvet bow. A long pin with a purple glass head fastened her hat on.

Then Tom Underhill arrived with his best man, one Charles Trevail. Both wore black coats and grey trousers, and both were men above average height; but the bridegroom's girth dwarfed that of his friend, who was of lighter mould.

As they went along Trevail searched the pews with his eyes and saw Lizzie in her place. He approached her and handed her a little bunch of stephanotis and maidenhair. She smiled, pointed to the rose that she wore, and gave the exotic to Nelly. The incident occupied but a moment and the heroine thereof forgot it immediately.

The homage of flowers was an everyday experience with her, but her act ruined the approaching festivity for Tom Underhill's best man.

Mr. Trevail was fair, with a big amber moustache, high forehead and kindly eyes. He had a strong hand and a deep intonation that suggested power. He was handsome, genial, fortunate in the possession of good health and a future cloudless. Charles Trevail was, in fact, the nephew of the man known as 'Iron' Pike, and other near relative the latter had none.

Now came Jack Joep, the shoemaker of the full quiver, and beckoned to his girl Emma, who sat with Nelly and Elisabeth. She left them and retired to a less conspicuous place, where her widowed father had seated four children in a row behind the font. Frank Madders, from the limestone quarry, arrived beaming, and after him followed a crowd of the Knapman and Burgoyne people—relations of the bride.

Miss Fanny Cann, with Tom's mother, a gigantic woman in red velvet, appeared next,

and soon afterwards the bride approached on her father's arm. She came up the aisle with her bridesmaids behind her, and at the rear was a slithering and whispering, where certain female spectators, with dirty aprons and downtrodden shoes, crept in and brought their children and babies to empty places at the rear of the church.

Minnie Burgoyne wore white, and reached only to her parent's shoulder. He stood very upright for all his sixty years, and as he went up the aisle his bald head caught reflections from stained glass and shone first purple as a swede, then red as a beet. The girl was large-featured, blue-eyed, and good-looking. Her face was strong, her self-possession was complete. She glanced about her, nodded to friends and picked up her father's buttonhole when it fell suddenly from his coat.

A clergyman with a red country face and iron-grey whiskers fluttered from the vestry door; the bells ceased, the bridegroom rose and ranged his bulk beside the bride. For all his size Tom was the diffident party, and he spoke in a voice stiller and smaller than that of conscience. But Minnie answered like a bell. The future adjustment of power between them might have been predicted from these responses.

When all was done Elisabeth and Nelly walked back to the Oxenham Arms together, and on the way the carriage with the bride and bridegroom passed them. Ned Startup drove it, and her new friend praised him to his sweetheart.

"A fine chap and kindness itself. You are very fortunate to get such a man."

"So I was without a doubt. Ned thinks a lot of me, I believe—more than I do of myself

anyway. I axed him whatever he saw in me and he couldn't tell."

"Love's like the lightning, Mr. Dunning says. You can't tell where it comes from."

"Or where it goes to either."

"I don't believe it dies once it's started."

"Oh yes, it does," declared Nelly. "It burns out. My poor mother hated father proper before she died."

"And yet Mr. Jope was very fond of her. He cries still—in the bar—when he talks about her."

"So fond that he shortened her days," answered the shoemaker's daughter. "So fond that he had fourteen children by her, and wrecked her, and overworked her till there was hardly enough left of her to fill a proper-sized coffin. I never like my father when I think of that."

"You won't have fourteen, I reckon?"

"Fourteen! No—nor yet four. Me and Ned be of a mind there. As one of fourteen I've seen too much."

Lizzie nodded.

"I'm like that too," she said. "So's Mr. Dunning. He's hard and sensible. But Mr. Trevail's different."

"Dunning's gone on you, I believe. Ned was saying but yesterday that we'd seen him more this last week than for a year before."

Lizzie shook her head.

"'Tis Mr. Underhill he comes to see. But Mr. Dunning is interesting, I will allow. Never says the expected thing. Terribly scornful of men and women—himself included."

"He don't talk very nicely about marriage—haven't got no patience with love and all that. But, after all, there's something in love. We don't

marry a man only to feed him. Granted we cook their food and are their food; but we get something back too, in exchange for ourselves and our life-long work and thought for 'em. But I'd sooner marry Trevail than Reynold Dunning."

Lizzie did not note the last remark. She was arrested by the earlier speech.

"What you say about what we do for them and they do for us is very interesting," she declared. "Some girls are built to seek a strong man, and let him shield 'em, and some would rather be useful and lift the man a bit."

"Men don't want girls to lift 'em," declared Nelly. "They'd think 'twas a great bore if a woman began that sort of thing."

"Yet I'm the kind that would want to do it. I believe I'd sooner have an easy, weak chap and feel myself working on him and stringing him up—I'd sooner have such a man than a strong, close man that I couldn't touch. I'd like to help a man to something better than he could be without me."

She lifted her eyes to Cosdon as she spoke. The hill towered under noon-tide light, but the light was broken by clouds. Rain swept over the Beacon, and its curtains of grey, tagged with glittering silver, extended for a few moments into the valley. The Beacon sank behind this brief storm; light and colour died out of it, until its higher and lower ridges rolled huge and dim and removed, like a cloud upon a cloud. But the rain quickly passed, the vapours thinned and feathered away, and the sun shone again.

The wedding feast was served in the public room of the Oxenham Arms—a long, low chamber

on the second floor. The new barmaid did not attend it, but having quickly changed her best gown, put on black and went to her work. Little was doing, however, and when presently, after proposing the bridesmaids, Mr. Trevail slipped from his seat and came down to the bar upon a pretext, he found her alone there.

Trevail plunged straight to the matter that had troubled him so much.

"Look here, why didn't you take the flower?"

"I'd got one."

"I had that rare, sweet flower specially for you from the gardener at Oxenham House."

"He's a very nice chap. He comes in here sometimes. He's offered me to go over the conservatories some day."

"Well, I think you might have taken it after all my trouble, Miss Densham."

She looked up at him with the sudden smile few could withstand.

"I did take it."

"And gave it to Nelly Jope."

"What does that matter? They'll miss you, won't they?"

"No, I'm not going back. Made an excuse about my uncle."

"He's the most peculiar man in South Zeal, I should think—Mr. Pike, I mean——"

"He's not a bad sort really."

"I shouldn't have thought he was your sort, however."

"More he is," declared Charles Trevail. "I'm easy-going and would sooner walk than run any day. But as the more he saves, the more I shall have to spend——"

She interrupted him impatiently.

"I call that a feeble thing to say. If you think meanness and stinting are wrong, why don't you tell him so?"

The man was startled.

"Good gracious! Quarrel with him! I'm the only friend he's got in the world."

"He's a terrible old man, I think."

"Money's power, however."

"It wouldn't be with me."

"Don't you want to be rich then?"

"No, it's the last thing I've ever hankered to be."

His face fell and he felt that this was bad news. The girl had done mighty things in the heart of Charles Trevail. He was in love with her and enduring tremendous novel and secret experiences for her sake. His monotonous life had been broken in upon by the gigantic thing. He was miserable and distracted. He had trusted to his prospects as the major hope with her; and he could ill bear to believe now, on her bare word, that she did not care much for money.

"Not as a master—not like my uncle—but as a servant. Money's a good servant, Miss Densham."

"'Twill never interest me to talk about it."

"Then I never will again. You don't judge me mean and close, I hope."

"I don't know anything about you."

"I'll tell you more come our walk. You haven't forgot your promise for Sunday."

"No, I haven't. I'm longing to see the Beacon. I look at it and think what 'tis like up there every day."

"You'll be cruel disappointed. 'Tis only a lonely old rogue's roost of a place. A good view

round about certainly, but the Beacon itself is nought. You'll be tired to death afore you get to the top."

He had suggested the walk some days before, and she had agreed to take it with him. He pleased her by his attention and she admired him. Especially she appreciated his deference to her opinions and his interest in her London life.

Presently a noise overhead told that the feast was done, and a few moments later Tom Underhill's bride descended into the bar. But she found Lizzie alone, for at the sound of the rising company above them Charles had departed.

The newly made wife came forward.

"You slip upstairs and have a bit of chicken and a glass of wine," she said. "I'll mind the bar. I want for Tom to see me behind it when he comes down. I told him I'd be there the very day we was married!"

Minnie took her place calmly and, as a customer came in at the same moment, she was able to draw a glass of beer and charge three halfpence for it.

Some of the wedding party entered the bar and saluted her uproariously.

"There," she said, showing them a penny and a halfpenny. "That's my luck, that is. I shall keep them coins for evermore, and Tom will have to get 'em made up in a brooch for me to wear."

Two hours later the wedded couple drove away to Okehampton and the guests departed.

CHAPTER V

CHARLES TREVAIL was an orphan and had neither brothers nor sisters. An accident deprived him of his mother before he was old enough to miss her, and his father died when the child had reached five years. Then, for his sister's sake, Abraham Pike adopted his nephew, educated him, and, when he was old enough, made over to him the tenancy of North Combe Farm, near the great quarry below South Tawton.

A willing submission to destiny was natural to this young man. And indeed his lines so far had run easily. His uncle exacted rent and exercised a complete control at North Combe, but the farm was prosperous and Charles knew no discomfort at his position. He was indeed absolutely contented with life as he found it, and had not felt any desire to modify the tenor of the years. He had never thought for himself or experienced the least ambition to do so until now. But with the advent of Elisabeth Densham all was changed and he began to taste the many-flavoured dish of love.

He came from her presence elated or cast down by the trend of their converse; and sometimes she seemed a little nearer and sometimes far off again. Her effect upon his life was extraordinary, and on many a sleepless night he had leisure to

consider it and mark the symptoms. Philanderings he could remember, and some shadowy experiments in romance occurred to him also; but the present signs and miseries had never appeared before, and by these he doubted not that here, beyond all question, was the real thing at last. For despite his fret of mind and ceaseless care, he found himself better in health, more vigorous, more interested in life than he had ever been until this time. Though eaten up with anxiety, he was cheerfuller and braver than he remembered to have been. He laughed and joked more with other men; he went out of his way to do acquaintances a service, and found himself entering into the affairs of his neighbours, though in reality they interested him not at all. He made promises to advance this man's welfare or do that man a good turn. At the back of his mind was a light always burning and beckoning.

But to be in her presence was the master desire; and when he could not be, he thought of those who were. A sensation of discomfort and doubt with respect to other men got hold of him. Once, in the bar, he saw a youth lift his hand and thrust a hairpin into place in Lizzie's mound of hair; and he grew hot and sulked and hated the man for daring to take such a liberty, and even the woman a little for allowing it. He, a stranger to jealousy or envy until now, became both jealous and envious. He was very impatient and inexperienced.

His love-making appeared crude in the eyes of a girl familiar with the operation as exhibited before her by many men, but she liked Trevail the better for that. His simplicity and earnestness

were equally apparent, and she smiled in secret at his little shifts and wiles.

But she grew more interested in him as she learned more of him. Because here was a man made to be helped not hindered by a woman; here was a man who would put the woman he loved on his throne, not offer her a footstool alongside of it. He was the type that she had always thought of as most likely to attract her.

Sometimes she helped him a little and sometimes she did not. Sometimes his speeches and gifts missed fire, and he was wretched until another opportunity offered; sometimes he pleased her, and the meeting went well. Then he rejoiced and hoped again, and departed, treading on air, to hunger for the next opportunity and busy his wits in making it. At forging opportunities he proved so cunning and full of resource that he astonished himself.

Within a month of her arrival there came the great walk to Cosdon Beacon. This proved a revelation every way, and the woman learned far more from it than she expected to learn; but the man sank for the time being into a lesser thing than the hill he showed her. The Beacon obliterated Mr. Trevail. Indeed, upon its bosom, in his Sunday clothes, he struck a wrong note.

They passed through the valley behind the inn; then they crossed the main road and began their climb. The Sunday afternoon shone fair and, since it was the season of harvest, out of the immense tessellation spread beneath them through the undulating leagues of Devon, there gleamed intermittently the glory of corn. It lay in little squares and wedges upon the face of the earth; and where distance reigned, and forest and farm

lands blended and melted together in a blue haze, the harvest still flashed, like far-off signals, or burnt in patches of gold when a sunbeam touched it and picked it out of the welter.

Tellus, fertile in flocks and fruits, had woven a coronet of corn for the brow of Ceres.

A chance spectator might have been struck by the wealth of woodlands displayed in this great scene. The hedgerows alone, where they merged in vanishing perspective, seemed to transform the world into one forest, and seen nearer, many deep woods and spinneys and copses, that marked the ways of water, abounded and hemmed in the champagne on every side. Cosdon's own breast was clad in fir and spruce at one point, where a forest crept a little way upward; and above it there still persisted evidences of man's fight with the Beacon. His fields stretched to right and left of the stony road and fought aloft; his walls and pathways scored the hill, like the varied lines scratched by science on a terrestrial globe; but ridge after ridge and billow upon billow the Beacon swept above these assaults and finally rose unconquered to its crown.

At a height of about a thousand feet Charles Trevail called the first halt and made Lizzie rest awhile above Horder's Wood. The bosky valley of Taw wound away immediately before them, and South Tawton's tower peeped above its grove; while far beneath, upon their right hand, like a brown and blue snake, wound Zeal's solitary and straight street across the meadows of hill and vale.

Elisabeth beheld all and found herself moved to a wonder beyond words. Such far horizons were a new vision to her. The man talked and showed

her where rolled the Severn Sea, where Exmoor stretched grey against the north, and where his own farm might be seen at their feet beyond the quarry. She listened without comment, but in reality she heard only a little of what he uttered, for her mind was absorbed by the first great view of earth that her eyes had ever seen.

Yet presently she could find it in her to turn to him, listen to him and thank him for showing her this wonder. She did not yet see him small against his background. That was to come. For the moment she felt that he had shown her a precious sight and that she must thank him for doing so. He embraced a world with a sweep of his arm. His indifference to such immensity seemed fine and she read a sort of greatness into it. She was ever swift to mark the manlike in man and ever glad to welcome it. Now, in a mood rather emotional before this glimpse of summer earth, she glorified Mr. Trevail a little with the rest. His handsome face was handsomer for his climb; his limitations of ambition and intellect she did not yet perceive as serious faults.

They climbed on, and when they had ascended some hundred yards higher up Cosdon's side, the village beneath was hidden from them; the forest trees disappeared and the upper loneliness of the Beacon began to encompass them and make itself felt. Trevail did not share his companion's increasing excitement.

"I hate it up here," he said. "Down lower the sight of the houses and low places makes all this bearable by contrast—for the feeling of thankfulness that home is there and not up here. But once you lose sight of them, like we have now, and

find nought but mire and rocks and desert round us—miles and miles of it—well, then I feel daunted for one, and so will you. 'Tis what you've been born to. That chap, Reynold Dunning, neighbours very kindly with it. But he's like it himself in a way—harsh and rough and a bit brutal."

"I seem as if I'd been waiting for this all my life," answered the other. "'Tis terrible grand, I think. I was told I'd love it, or hate it. A friend I had in London said that. 'There's no half measures with the Moor,' he said. 'You'll love it or you'll hate it.'"

"Who was he then? I've never heard you name him afore."

He spoke sharply and she knew that he was jealous. For a brief moment he bored her. Any display of such instinct at this moment was jejune.

"Don't be talking. Let me just suck this in as we go along. I understand a bit already. A keen, searching place in winter, I warrant!"

"Who was the man who told you about it?"

She paid no attention and Mr. Trevail felt consumed with irritation. Then he answered her last remark.

"Yes, in winter the very birds leave it, I believe. No man have ever tamed Cosdon, though you can see how oft they have tried to do so."

She was thinking and feeling. The heath seemed to stretch out invisible hands to her. It happens in the world sometimes that there are arenas whither we come, not only to find them but to find ourselves also. The Beacon now, as it rolled upward before her, began to quicken the mind of Elisabeth Densham. She felt that she

had met a friend, and a spark of sentiment touched her.

"I'll always remember that you were the first to show me all this," she said suddenly.

"I'll show you what is a deal better in the valleys."

"Never! Give me the thing that's not been tamed, as you said just now."

"Not been tamed I grant—but it have tamed a good many others—broken them you might say in heart and pocket."

She laughed.

"My pocket's empty. And it won't break my heart."

"Don't get too fond of it. Belike 'twill make you hard, like itself, if you were to."

"I don't feel 'tis hard," she declared.

"It is though—a snarling thing at odds with the winds that batter it, and the frosts that freeze it, and the men that come to it to tear peat and gravel out of it. It makes the people hard, I tell you. A Moorman's always as hard again as a man from the valleys. My uncle's got a saying: 'If you want to be 'appy you must be 'ard.' And I suppose that's what this place has taught him."

She shook her head. A side of her he had not seen flashed up.

They stood among the cairns at last, and he explained that they were graves of 'the old men.'

At the summit of the Beacon was rough, broken ground over which a fierce west wind roared mightily, while the crystal air throbbed at heath level along the lifting planes of the hill. Earth hereabouts was torn and deeply scarred. A torrent had scratched Cosdon to her granite bones

and left a deep wound in the black peat ; a wilderness of stone scattered the waste and great patches of sward stretched upon it. Here were rhomboidal scars where man had stripped the pelt off the hill and carried it away. Heath and furze made a spasmodic splendour, but the summit, where the beacon pile of grey granite crowned all, was desolate with mire and sedge and morass.

Lizzie stared about her, and the man found himself forgotten for a season.

"I've never seen so much of the world all at once before," she said. "It's wonderful; it's wonderful. I'd like to be buried here myself when I die; but I don't want to die: I never want to die. Oh, if I could come here every day of my life, I'd never die!"

"I'd sooner see the Beacon from North Combe, than North Combe from the Beacon myself."

"You don't care for it?"

"I do not."

They sat sheltered from the wind by a great ring of piled stones at the summit. He pointed out Chagford and Moreton, Hameldown and Hey Tor far away to the south, the valley of Teign and the mouth of Teign open to the misty sea.

"That's Throwleigh down under," he said, "and the common's called Clannaboro'—the same as Dunning's farm."

Silence fell between them; then Charles uttered a violent expression of annoyance and used an oath.

"Be damned if he isn't coming here !" he said, and pointed to a horseman who climbed the hill from the south above Raybarrow Pool. Lizzie was not yet trained of eyesight to see at so great a distance.

"What's the matter?" she asked, and the other pointed below.

"'Tis Dunning, and he's coming here."

"What if he is?"

He uttered a sound of impatience but made no other reply. Then he resigned himself, scowled at the rider and took a pipe from his pocket. Dunning was beside them in five minutes. He had seen them long ago, when they began their ascent, had guessed the Beacon was their goal, and had determined with himself to surprise them there. He knew exactly what must be the state of Trevail's feelings ; but that did not trouble him. He entertained no admiration for Charles.

He was callous now and ignored the younger man's annoyance. He began talking to Lizzie and interesting her, albeit she understood very well that by all laws of good manners Dunning should not have thrust himself upon this walk. But he was arresting. He knew far more of the world outspread beneath them than did Charles, and her enthusiasm for the Beacon won from him commendation.

Usually silent, and sometimes cynical, here, on his native heath, he appeared more human and unsophisticated. He told her the names of the grasses under her feet. He spoke of the fragrant candleberry myrtle that grew not a mile off on the slopes above Taw and offered to lead Elisabeth to it.

With unconcealed ill-humour Trevail acceded to the interruption. He walked on one side of the girl, and Dunning, dismounting, proceeded upon the other.

Words passed between them presently, and the master of Clannaboro' proved by much the

mightier with those weapons. It was Trevail who provoked the attack, but showed himself quite unequal to repelling it when the elder man hit back.

"So my uncle was one too many for you at Okehampton I hear?" he asked.

"He was," admitted Dunning. "He's one too many for most plain-dealers."

"You don't hate him worse than he hates you."

"We always hate them we've wronged. And time and again he's wronged me. No tongue likes a sharp tooth, and a sharp tooth he's been to me ever since I tried to get the limestone quarry away from him and failed. But I'll try again and not fail."

"You speak as one who's felt his lash," answered Trevail.

"Yes, every man who doesn't knuckle under soon falls foul of him. The man that's friendly with him is a second-rater—same as you. You're the mean sort that only think which side your bread is buttered and care not for anything else—the spaniel sort that don't count in the world."

Here the woman protested.

"If you've only come to quarrel, Mr. Dunning, I'd liefer you were away," she said.

"Quiteright," he answered instantly. "Quarrels of men look what they are up here—no more than the fighting of ants. I forgot my company. I respect Pike for his strength, though I hate him for himself."

Trevail expressed regret also.

"We can talk about it another time if you want to," he said. "'Twas I began it, and I'm sorry I did. 'Twasn't civil."

Elisabeth talked and Trevail sulked. Then

suddenly, with an abruptness in leave-taking peculiar to him, Dunning mounted and left them.

"I'm not wanted in this party," he said. "What I don't know about Cosdon Beacon is like what Charles here do know about it—not worth knowing. Some other day then. Yonder's the candleberry by that water on ahead."

He galloped off without any sort of salute or farewell.

"That's Moor manners," declared Trevail, while Lizzie laughed. "Doesn't even wear Sunday clothes, you see."

"He's rough and queer, but he's a fearless sort of man seemingly. His clothes suit the place somehow better than ours."

The subtlety of the observation was quite wasted on Trevail.

"He's rough enough, as you say, and he hates my Uncle Abraham. He was different when his mother lived. He's what I call an uncomfortable sort of man. Rasps you whenever you meet him."

"You began it though."

"He put me out by coming to us. 'Twasn't fair or proper."

They had reached a spot where marsh fell in steps between tussocks of grass and heather. Through the midst a stream ran over granite gravel and splinters of quartz. It dropped here and there in little falls, where grass hung with dripping, sodden beards; and along its way sprang clumps of neat sage-green bushes.

"That's the bog-myrtle," said Charles. He plucked some sprigs and handed them to her. "Crush the leaves and smell 'em. You'd never think such a sweet thing could live on Cosdon."

Lizzie obeyed and enjoyed the scent of this fragrant foliage.

"Lovely!" she cried. "And why shouldn't it come from here? I'll never buy another bottle of scent again. I love it. 'Tis the Beacon's own smell!"

She gathered some to take home with her.

"I've been on the lookout all this while for a bit of white heather," he said. "'Twas thought to mean luck."

"I believe in finding your own luck. Nobody else can find it for you."

This sentiment chilled him, though he did not know why. He had made a little plot with himself and resolved that if he found white heather he would give it to her and ask for something in exchange. He had soared to the thought of a kiss. But now he drooped and felt the idea many sizes too bold.

The smell of the sweet gale rejoiced Lizzie. Several times she stopped and crushed a leaf of it and put her nose to it and shut her eyes, that vision might not interfere with complete satisfaction of the lesser sense.

They returned presently through the valley of the Taw, and the girl became very quiet when they had descended. She often stood still and looked back.

"I'm sorry in a silly sort of way to have fetched these poor little leaves from their home," she said.

Her parting words were precious to him.

"Thank you very, very much, Mr. Trevail. 'Twas more than kind to spend such a long time with me."

"Don't you say that. I'll spend as long a time

with you as ever you like, and as often as you like," he answered.

He shook her hand while he spoke and held it some moments afterwards. She looked into his face with grateful eyes that seemed to cry for kissing.

"By God, you're lovely!" he said under his breath to her. Then he dashed off without waiting to see how she took it.

CHAPTER VI

MISS FANNY CANN, while easy with her own sex, could be exceedingly severe when chance put her in authority over the other. Thus during her nephew's honeymoon, when she reigned at the Oxenham Arms, the men and boys employed there found little leisure, but the women had no cause to complain.

Thus it happened that the newcomer began her ministrations under gentle auspices. She found time for thought and time for happiness, apart from work. Miss Cann liked her and unquestionably spoiled her. With the elasticity of a youthful mind Lizzie Densham threw herself into the new life. Here it seemed to her that poverty was not so mean as in London. She was quick to think well of the people and grateful for the spirit of goodwill and friendship they extended to herself. It seemed impossible that such immense interests should have risen in her life so swiftly. Nature was speaking to her through the mouth of the Moor, and, beyond that, there stood a man at the door of her life and loved her.

At present, however, rustic life, in its sharp antagonism to the policy of cities, most profoundly affected Elisabeth. She came, as a child comes to to-morrow, with a mind upon which experience had bitten nothing very deep; her

new environment spread kindly arms to her; the Beacon lifted above it had already uttered one salutary word.

For her awoke a hungry and thirsty joy of Cosdon. She read into it all manner of meanings and waited eagerly, sometimes fearfully, for fresh revelations. It explained things in herself that she had not understood. Within a month she yearned for it and felt no week quite full that had not found her feet climbing the hill. Its rounded mass upon the sky and diurnal message through sun and storm, winter snow and summer cloud, in halo of moonlight and nimbus of mist—each manifestation in its turn was good. She loved everything, to the least hollow and secret spring and hidden place of flowers.

Nelly Jope foretold that their liberties and leisure would be much curtailed when Mr. Underhill and his wife returned home, and she was right. The new mistress began as she intended to proceed; Aunt Fanny returned to her cottage on the edge of Cosdon; the men breathed again; the women soon felt that a holiday had ended. The demoralisation of transitory ease bore fruit in one direction, for the cook gave warning. In a week she reconsidered this step and proposed to stay, but the new mistress belonged to another order. The cook was not permitted to change her mind, and a stable-man, to whom she was affianced, reluctantly departed also. Tom Underhill had much desired to keep this man, and the question bred the first difference between him and his wife. Each felt, hidden from the other, that the matter was more tremendous than on its face it appeared; each understood that precedent was about to be created. The affair kept them waking at night,

and indirectly it banished sleep from other eyes. Tom Underhill's voice, while pitched in a key not very masculine, was of a penetrating calibre, and while he argued, Lizzie in her chamber, and Nelly and the cook, who shared another not far off, were kept awake.

Tom tossed and turned, but his wife remained motionless. She lay on her back and swung up and down easily, like a light ship at anchor, while her husband's bulk set the bed shaking.

"I killed my old dog because you didn't like him in the parlour, though he'd have held out another year if I hadn't," said the man. "I did that for you, and now 'tis your turn to meet me I should think. I can't let Bill go. He's very useful and very clever. And she's a rare good cook—you can't deny that. So if she sees she was mistaken, well, who can do more?"

"I'll never take back a servant that's once given notice. 'Tis a question of right and wrong. When I was to service myself I learned all about that. She's got to go, and if she's that malicious to make William go too, don't that show what she is? Be you to be dictated to by your servants? Not if I'm anybody."

He heaved about and snorted.

"If she couldn't cook I'd say nothing."

"She can cook—I know that. That's what she's here for. But you're like all men: if you get a decent servant you think you've found the only one, and that the world will come to an end if you have to change. She's going, Tom, and you know very well I've got to make her."

"'Twill upset all the others," he grumbled. "You know what they be—like sheep. If one goes, the others will all be after her."

"Let 'em. 'Tis a free country. 'Twouldn't surprise me. After your easy ways, 'tis like enough the men and women both will find the new style irk 'em a bit."

"If I'd known——" he began, but she cut him short.

"You did know," she said. "Now, my dear, good man, don't you begin like that. You knew—as well as you knew the price of beer—what I was. I never hid it; I never pretended I was different. The very day you offered and I said 'Yes,' I told you what I wanted and meant to have. The Burgoynes are all the same—every blessed one of 'em. We've got a good conceit of ourselves, and why not? And we will have our money's worth, and why not? And we will have things just so, and why not?"

"The men be my part and you oughtn't to interfere in that."

"Granted. I never shall. 'Tis very unfortunate indeed, but you can't keep men away from women."

"Bill's got to choose between us and his girl. Well, naturally——"

"And I've got to choose between what I think right and what I think wrong. Well, naturally again——"

"But ban't I nobody? Don't my wish count? If I'm set on it—surely then, Minnie? Besides, 'tis no question of right and wrong at all. 'Tis only a question of opinion. Look at it in the large. The girl gives notice in a minute of temper. Who's always wise? 'Twas a silly thing and she repented——"

"Yes, after she found she couldn't get the place she wanted to Okehampton."

"No matter for that. She repented and said she was sorry, and—and——" He turned over and put his great arms round her and hugged her up close to himself and rubbed his cheeks against hers.

"Be sporting about it! I want Bill very bad. I ax as a favour. I won't forget it if you can meet me. 'Twill be a jolly fine thing in you to give way—just this once. And you know me. I'll give way twenty times for your once—you see if I don't."

He coaxed with elephantine love-making, but she would not yield. So he released her, and swore, and ordered her to be silent when she began to speak again. In this particular she obeyed, but it was dawn before either of them slept.

Thus there opened before Lizzie's eyes and mind another interest: the early scenes of a drama whose players were a disparate twain drawn together by the sleight of love, and subsequently chained together by the law of man. Life was interesting from every standpoint. She found matter for laughter and regret, for sympathy and antipathy, for all the shades of emotion between wonder and fear.

With time there emerged steadily, against the background of the Beacon, the figures of two men, who surpassed in interest any other human beings she had known. One had forced himself upon her from the first, the other, in a manner very different, similarly stood out from the rest. The company of the Oxenham Arms made but the crowded middle distance of a picture for twin protagonists in the foreground. One man was humble, obstinate, generous, kind, and weak; the other was sardonic, covert, harsh, and strong.

Trevail's attitude and intentions were obvious,

and she had come to take them for granted. She liked him, and Dunning she could not like; but Dunning was far the more interesting man. His thoughts went deeper and challenged more approval or censure. He seldom dealt in the obvious thing, and generally took a pleasure in denying the obvious thing. When he was in the bar platitudes perished. There was one other man built in a similar pattern, but his taciturnity and acerbity were greater than Dunning's. Abraham Pike's native genius cut him off from the company of fellow-creatures. Them he only regarded as means to an end, as the pieces on that board where he was playing his own game of life single-handed. But Dunning did not eschew men. He affected them. He possessed a cynical mind, but one not misanthropic. His attitude to women had, however, been very narrow all his life. From his mother onward he had dominated them unconsciously. He was that sort of man who wins the sex without an effort. He owned a power not to be acquired and not necessarily used by the possessor—a power often denied to the professed amorist and sometimes wasted on one who may care nothing for women.

Dunning had cared nothing for them until now, but the tables were turned at last, and not a few who had suffered at heart for him, and loathed him while they loved him, were to see the man enslaved and their sex indemnified for his slighting.

Quick eyes and hungry hearts here and there marked the thing that had happened, and a few female bosoms fluttered in secret to know the bear of Clannaboro' was in love. Certainly few wished him good courting or any joy of it.

He moved slowly, but he was always interesting

to Elisabeth Densham, even when he angered her. Then there came a day in the bar when Dunning and Trevail met, and the former reminded her of a promise.

Trevail was about to depart and spoke as he did so.

"You'll meet me to-morrow and we'll go down in the valley. You promised, if I went again to the Beacon, you'd come to the valley next time."

"She can't," said Dunning, shortly. "On Friday of last week Miss Densham told me that she'd come and see Clannaboro' and stop tea along with Mrs. Vallance and Noah and me. 'Twasn't convenient to ask her sooner, or very like I should have done. She promised, however."

"Did I?" asked Lizzie, a glass in one hand, a duster in the other.

"Don't say 'Did I?' You know you did. You've got a very good memory, as I've proved."

"I did—I remember."

"I hold you to it. We'll go up the hill if 'tis fair weather. You can mess about in the valley with Charles here another day."

"I'll come then, and I hope you'll be civil to me. What a snappy man you are!"

"I'm myself. Come if you want to—not else. I've got no Sunday manners."

He looked sternly upon her, and Trevail, now at the door, waited to hear the girl's answer.

"I promised to come and that's enough," she said.

The younger farmer went off and his spirit raged. He rejoiced to think that the strongest man in Zeal was Dunning's enemy. But this was a battle that no other—not even his Uncle Abraham—could fight for him. Dunning's tardy methods

he knew and felt no immediate concern; yet his power he also knew, and, thinking upon it, began to grow anxious.

He considered the things that he had heard Lizzie say concerning the man, and could recall none that suggested admiration. Indeed there was much about him that she had frankly disliked. He remembered once in the bar how she had reproved Dunning to his face and told him he had too little care for other people, too much for himself. And he recollected the master of Clannaboro's answer.

"You're right," he said. "I know it. But wait till I find them that be worth caring about!"

When Trevail was gone Reynold Dunning declared that he should expect Lizzie soon after three o'clock at his farm.

"You might come and fetch me, I should think," she told him, but he refused.

"You can't miss the way. Keep your eye on Throwleigh church tower and you'll find us. If you'd like to ride a pony up over, I'll have one ready for you; if not we'll walk."

"I can't ride."

"I suppose not. Then we'll travel afoot."

He went as far as the door, omitting any parting salutation in his usual abrupt style. He stopped, however, and came back and looked her straight between the eyes with his steady, searching stare.

"I'm glad you're coming," he said.

Then he turned and was gone. But she felt quite conscious of the force behind his words. She had heard much of him and his ways and egregious manners towards her sex, and she guessed that never before in his life had he told a woman he would be glad to see her.

CHAPTER VII

BEYOND THE VILLAGE of South Tawton is a natural fault or fissure in the country-side. Here are things useful to man, and for generations he has gathered from this place blue limestone for his needs. The earlier workings round about have passed back into Nature's hand, and at the entrance to the great quarry, rented from the manor lord by Abraham Pike, lofty, artificial slopes arose, and a deep tarn spread amid them. The little hills and the great pit were alike human work, but now larch and oak clothed the one and water filled the other.

On an autumn day the hollow beneath these well-fledged elevations was shining like a cat's-eye stone set in rich borders of emerald and jade. The season had set a flame along the fringes of the pond, and to its banks came the first fret of clematis seed and the jewels of wild fruits. Haws shone crimson on the thorn, and the scarlet heps of the dog-rose hung where pale flowers had blushed beside the dark pool in June. Here and there a floating pond weed broke the face of the lake; and so clear was the water that the plants might be seen flinging down their anchors six feet through the crystal and finding roothold in the stones below. Dragon flies glittered with green and topaz fire upon the weeds at the brink

and hawked overhead with crisp rustle of flashing gauzes; a moorhen clucked danger to her chicks, and the tiny black creatures seemed to run along the face of the water to safety in their mother's secluded haunt. The pond was very deep in the midst, and, beneath the sky picture painted on its bosom, displayed that gloom proper to a great density of water crowded between narrow walls of earth. Southerly the wooded banks rose sheer and dark limestone ribs thrust through the foliage to support overhanging branches of ilex and oak, hazel and many a great ivy tod whose grey roots twined like snakes among the low crags of the cliff.

Mystery brooded upon the face of this hollow and filled its cup in dark hours before storm, or at the approach of night. The atmosphere that haunts abandoned undertakings of men homed here and humanity felt it. Children, with imagination still untarnished, fearfully loved the place, sought perils about it, and wove around it the highest terrors that their infant brains could summon.

A rude punt was moored to the bank, and now there came to it a man. He carried a hazel rod and a can, and he unmoored the boat, pushed off into the water and anchored with a stone and a coil of rope at the distance of twenty yards from the shore. He scattered ground bait to attract the coarse fish that prospered beneath; then, having waited a while, he cast out a line and began to fish.

The angler was some sixty years of age, and presented a tough and sturdy mien. His clothes were patched but not ragged; he wore no hat upon his thick and short grey hair; round, immensely powerful shoulders supported a neck

too short but very strong. He was undersized and muscle-bound. The face was leonine as to the jowl, but an aquiline nose and eyes confused the type and left an observer conscious of mingled attributes, of courage mixed with cunning, of physical strength and mental craft combined. His short grey beard covered the man's round chin and came up high on his cheek-bones; his nose was heavy and dropped a little over his shaven upper lip. The under lip protruded. his eyes were small and the palest blue—a colour so faint that the black pupils almost killed it. The frontal bones were thrust forward in bold, simious ridges above the eyes, and black eyebrows surmounted them. His skull was broad above the ears, but the forehead was very receding, and the cranium appeared to be flattened under its close, upstanding thatch of grey. This man had kinship with elemental things and stood out from his kind somewhat sharply by reason of his nature. He seemed one belated in the advance of evolution. He was primitive; he bridged a gulf between past and present. His vigour, strength, ferocity and singleness of purpose were prehistoric. He was more than an atavist, for his endowment stretched through a vast unchronicled ancestry, and seemed to stand as a link between the neolith and the present-day natives of the Moor. He approached nearer to early than to late man; he scorned his fellows and lived the most detached life possible for a gregarious creature, for he was a herd hater, and everyday minds felt something akin to a sense of outrage when they considered the existence of him. He seemed to be an anachronism, a freak of Mother Nature, who, scorning the uplifting labour of

countless centuries, had turned back, built a man in the old image and thrust him here among her latest patterns to mark the contrast. It might have been supposed that such a jest was likely to make the subject miserable, but this had not happened. 'Iron' Pike was no more miserable than any other predatory creature. He had the saving virtues of his nature. He trampled through life like a wild boar, and held himself a man gifted above common men, in that he was superior to their weaknesses. He was not honest, but had a respect for law, because in youth a term of imprisonment had enforced the same. At eighteen he worked on a farm and was turned off for wrong-doing. Thereupon he burned his master's ricks and went to gaol for three years. From that time forward he had broken no written law. His sole interest in life was the getting of money. None knew his secrets, and he lived absolutely alone. His schemes were many and he had a mind quick to over-reach and pitiless in act. He was ignorant and frittered away none of his energies on thought or the acquiring of knowledge. He quarrelled with none who left him alone, but any collision of interests, any opposition offered where his will was set, woke in him a frank hostility and found him remorseless, obstinate and unforgiving. He never forgot and he never forgave. Such a figure in its dimensions bulked as large over Zeal as Cosdon's self. Mr. Pike made history and furnished an unceasing theme for indignant comment. Sooner or later he clashed with most men round about, for his enterprises embraced all rural affairs, and in these exchanges he generally conquered.

And now this archaic spirit sat in his home-

made punt and fished for his dinner—after the primeval fashion. One might have guessed that such a man would have deputed mean work to mean hands and not wasted time upon it; but here the neolith appeared again, and his cunning and distrust of others came between Abraham Pike and any large achievement. He permitted none to fish in his pond for him, because he knew that fish would be stolen if he did so. He calculated that the discovery of these coarse fish had saved him ten pounds a year in food. He made many meals off them, and when he discovered that a kingfisher had chosen the place for a home he did not rest until he had shot the bird.

He lived alone and performed all his offices for himself. His evening visit to the Oxenham Arms was the only conventional act of his day, and he went there for business, not pleasure. By drinking in the public bar nightly he learned what was doing—a sort of information none vouchsafed to him for choice. Few but his nephew had ever been inside his doors, and few desired to go. He employed twenty men at the limestone quarry, and had the habit of watching them, himself unseen, from the edge of the neighbouring wood.

Now the man sat and watched his float. He caught his fish by weight and knew to an ounce when two pounds were taken. They represented a meal, and the length of the sport depended on the size of the prey. In an hour he had killed two dozen small perch and a half-pound dace. These he cleaned, threw the offal into the water, and then rowed himself ashore. He strung the fish upon a rush, hung them to a tree until he returned, and set off for his quarry.

Behind the lake, winding into a larger fissure

beyond, roads of blue limestone extended amid old workings to the present site of activity. Gorse and coltsfoot, bramble, and thorn buried the mounds along the way, and beside it went a bustling stream. Presently this water ran out upon a trestle bridge, where the land fell, and so reached a water-wheel and set the simple machinery of the quarry in motion. A rail for trolleys spanned the way and sank into the great cavity of the mine. Upon it ran little trucks that brought up the stone from the pit and carried it to the carts for road metal and building, or to the kilns for lime. A mighty mass of masonry, like a fortress, was the double kiln. On one side ivy climbed; above a ruined, battlemented wall extended; beneath gaped a hollow, where the mouths of the kilns opened. Here the air was full of dust of lime, and great mounds of calcined stone awaited removal.

Round about the quarried stone lay in heaps. It was of a rich, dark blue-black, all veined and shot with glittering quartz.

One kiln only was alight, and Pike now ascended to it and began to talk with the old man, 'Lucky' Madders, the kiln-master. Mr. Madders was seventy and seemed to breathe out yellow dust of lime. His little eyes twinkled from encrustations of the burnt stone; his fringe of whiskers, his hair and cap were all coloured pale saffron by his work. Sometimes he coughed and spat, for the air above the kiln was foul and acrid, and the atmosphere below it full of dust. The powder had plastered on to his hot skin and neck. Indeed every visible part of him was painted, save his lips, which came redly through, kept clean by constant licking.

Seen from above the gaping crater of the kiln

opened in a wide circle with steep brick sides. Sulphurous fumes ascended from it, and even in daylight the mass below glimmered with red-hot eyes through the crackling stone. A subdued, sullen spluttering came from the kiln, and a sharp, sour smell rose out of it. Slowly the stone crumpled and turned white, as coal dust was flung thinly upon it and further masses from the quarry thrown in. For months the process of burning lime would continue, while Lucky replenished from the top and drew out the lime from the bottom. Upon the fierce floor of the kiln, where blue flames shot and danced, broke out little explosions of the bursting marble as stone after stone was shattered by the terrific heat from beneath.

Pikewent no further into his quarry, but stopped here and began to quarrel with the lime burner.

"Wasting coal again," he said. "Haven't I told you I won't have you fling in coal as if it was straw? Where's the last ton? Gone, of course, and what to show for it?"

"I'm ten years older than you and I was burning lime afore you were born," answered Lucky. "Afore you was born I was at it, for my father taught me the ways of it at that tender age, and if you think you can find a man as'll fetch more stuff out of this kiln than what I do, and cheaper too, then you think wrong."

Mr. Madders was one of the very few people who did not fear his master. He had worked at the kiln long before Pike came to rent the quarry. Drawing lime was the labour of his life, and he never yielded to any man on the subject of his own business.

The other growled.

"I'll throw you in the kiln if you talk like that to me," he said.

"Not you; you know my worth too well for that. And this I'll tell you, I'm getting mighty old, 'Iron' Pike. I shan't draw much more lime for you, and instead of snarling at me for a handful of coal-dust, you'll do better to bethink you if I didn't ought to be pensioned off, to wash the dirt out of my hair for ever and grow aged in dignity and cleanliness, like my father afore me."

"Pensions be damned! You'll get no pensions from me—none of you. You've had more wages than you'm worth for twenty year from me alone. And me sweating and slaving and living on orts to keep the likes of you in fatness! What do I get out of the quarry but trouble?"

"A lot," answered Lucky. "Be you the man to farm this here quarry twenty year for fun? And, be that as it will, if you don't pension me afore I'm ten year older, 'twill be a very great disgrace. Not that you'll care for that."

"You're right there. I'm only feared of one thing in this world and that's to quarrel with the law. I've had enough of law. 'Tis a master that can lay you by the heels, but you can't hit back. But as for men, the man ban't born I care a turnip for."

He stopped and strained his ear.

"Why ban't they working in the quarry this minute?"

"Because Tawton church clock have gone twelve. 'Tis only men like me that pay no heed to hours and work early and late for their masters."

Abraham looked at his watch and prepared to depart.

"If there's any tomfoolery in your mind about

a pension, get it out," he said. "You've had the luck to earn your bread for sixty years, and if you haven't put away a nest-egg in all that time, more fool you. I'd sooner chain the gang of you in the bottom of the quarry and stop the pumps and let the water drown you by inches than give you pensions. Who'll ever offer me a pension? And who've worked so hard as me?"

"Nobody but the devil," answered Mr. Madders. "But because you like to live on pigs' food, to save farthings, be that any reason why us Christian members should go without our comforts? If you heard what I heard about you, you'd have a very unrestful night sometimes."

The other laughed at that.

"I'd be unrestful if people spoke good of me. I want their fear and their blame. Blast 'em—what are they but a lot of rotten cattle with foot-and-mouth disease? If they dared—but they dare nought. 'Comforts!' 'Tis only cowards and women and kennel-kept cur-dogs that want comforts. The battle don't go to the comfortable or the race to the cool. Let them that call themselves men sweat for it and fight for it and starve for it, and go bloody-fingered and ragged for it! 'Tis the likes of them that get things, not you trash, only fit to break stones and run errands."

He went off, and Lucky, very familiar with these explosions, shrugged his shoulders and joined half a dozen men sitting within earshot behind the wall of the wheel house.

He opened a red cotton handkerchief and took his dinner from it—some cold meat and potatoes in a pie-dish.

"Have he gone?" asked a thin man with one drooping eyelid and a long, anxious face.

"Yes, he's gone. I'm the safety-valve as usual. 'Tis I get all the blow-off of him, because, though I be the oldest among ye, I'm the valiantest and ban't afeared of his noises and gnashings."

"You've got the weight of seventy years behind you," said the thin man. "For my part I tremble like a leaf afore him and always shall do. There's fierce beasts in the world and there's timid beasts; but the timid beasts be a damned sight usefuller than the fierce ones when all's said."

"You'm sheep to his wolf—all but me," declared Lucky Madders.

"What I say is this," replied an elderly, black-bearded man who had finished his food. "What I say, and what I pray in my prayers and ban't ashamed to own to, be this, that 'Iron' Pike won't get the lease when the time comes for renewing of it. The new landlord don't like him and 'tis odds but he'll be flinged out. Then we shall all breathe again."

"Not us," answered another middle-aged worker. "Tenants may come and go, but they'm all the same from our point of view. We're only machinery, like this here wheel; but when we rot, we can't be mended like it can, and so we drop off."

Meantime the master had returned to his fish and carried them home. Arrived, he broke up a banked fire, put on a frying-pan, cooked his meal and ate it quickly with some bread and dripping. He flung the bones to a large black-and-white cat that waited for them in the yard, and then went out again into the village.

CHAPTER VIII

MINNIE UNDERHILL belonged to the order of Martha. She could not live happily in a house with a broken window or a room with a treacherous chair. She had a marvellous eye for weak spots, dry rot, wet rot, damp and disorder. She turned her new home inside out before she had been in it a month, and Tom experienced much discomfort, but he said no word except in private to her. Soon he learned that opposition was useless and accepted the changes in a silent spirit. She loved Tom well, but so convinced was she that her way was the right one and her husband's the wrong, that she would bate nothing and make no concessions. Her pain was real, but she looked forward and felt very sure that a time would come when her husband must turn round and call her blessed. She predicted an increased prosperity; she fired the man to new ambitions; she even deprecated his pleasures and sought to change them. He was weak and endured all this.

To Lizzie Densham the spectacle of such a married pair presented problems of very absorbing interest. Heart and soul she sympathised with the young wife and told herself that even thus would she labour with love, to lift a man above his own ideals, and make him better and

wiser by her sleepless care on his behalf; but she saw both sides of the game, and she could not fail to mark the troubles of the man. He hid them from many eyes, but not from hers. Once or twice, when his wife was at market and the bar chanced to be empty, Tom had come there to chat with her and lift unconsciously a corner of the curtain that hid his mind. The ready sympathy and understanding of the young woman attracted him. Moreover, he knew that Lizzie and her mistress were the best of friends, and that Minnie often cited the barmaid as a type of what a woman worker ought to be. He felt it no crime, therefore, to talk to the girl, and even confide at a point or two. And Lizzie, very quick to appreciate this attitude, felt a great emotion of friendship for the harassed giant. Presently her conviction that his wife could do no wrong was a little shaken, and with further lapse of time she came to hold the balance pretty evenly between them. She learned no little from each, and told herself that when her time came she would preserve a golden mean in marriage, and strive to practise a fine reciprocity. She compared Tom Underhill with Charles Trevail to the advantage of the latter. She assured herself that the young farmer had a larger intellect and larger ideas than the publican. She doubted not that it would be easy to help him without the painful self-assertion that Minnie Burgoyne had brought into married life.

Then came the visit to Clannaboro' and speech with a different spirit in the shape of Reynold Dunning.

His farm was a long, low building, two hundred years old. Its chimneys of granite and brick rose out of a deep, silver-brown thatch mottled with

moss. A few elms sprang beside it, and in the garden that opened before the front was a single great fir, with a flat head. A lauristinus and a rhododendron grew beside the door, and over the white-washed face of the homestead a mighty cydonia flourished and spattered half the house front with crimson in the spring time. The porch was deep and the door massive. The rooms were low but large, and there were many of them unoccupied. Byres and cattle houses of modern build, mostly roofed with iron, clustered a little apart from the dwelling, while before it spread a wedge-shaped expanse of turf. At the end of the garden a rill from the adjacent Moor fed a pond. Behind Clannaboro' towered the Beacon, and before it the hill sank into a bottom of forest that rose again to green fields beyond. Then ascended a further slope, whose wooded ridges were surmounted by the church tower of Throwleigh.

Reynold Dunning was smoking in his garden when his visitor arrived.

"You're welcome," he said. "I've planned to go for a walk along with you and show you Raybarrow Pool, which you wanted to see. Then we'll come back to tea."

He turned to an old woman who came out of the farm.

"This is Mrs. Vallance, my housekeeper. By the look of that thing on her head she is going to afternoon church at Throwleigh."

A little woman with a very brown face greeted the visitor. She wore her black Sunday gown and a bonnet with red flowers in it.

"You'll be Miss Densham from the inn, I suppose? Wonders never cease. 'Twas not

heard that this here man ever went walking with a maiden afore. You can snort, Dunning, but well you know that such a thing hasn't happened to you till now."

"See you're back to boil the kettle, and mind your own business till then," retorted the other; but Mercy Vallance was not concerned at his harsh tongue. She had seen him grow from childhood and loved him.

"You teach the master manners and cut his claws if you know how," she said to Lizzie, "and then I'll reckon you're the cleverest girl that ever came to Dartymoor."

"You're fortunate to have such a nice old lady to keep house for you," declared the girl when Mrs. Vallance was out of earshot.

But Dunning made no concession.

"Be you ready to start?" he asked.

"No, I'm not. I want to rest a bit. I'll sit here in the garden. What a pretty old house to be sure!"

"A lonely place for one man."

"You're not the sort to be lonely—too busy for that."

"The busiest be lonely—off and on. You can't be doing figures and planning how to get the best out of life all the time. There's the nights—the long nights, when you lie awake and know that, for all you've got, you've missed what's best."

She stared at this streak of sentiment—flashing like a gracious beam of light from the usual dark welter of his mind. He saw her surprise and sneered at himself.

"Well you may look astonished! That's the sort of stuff Charlie Trevail bleats, I expect. But

d'you like it? I've seen you a score of times now and I should say you hadn't much use for drivel."

"What do you call drivel?"

"If you've rested we'll start and then I'll tell you. There's a queer thing about me, I can't talk standing still, or sitting still. I want for my legs, or a horse's legs, to be moving under me afore I can talk."

They started presently, and he took up her question.

"I call love-making drivel, so far as I can see it. 'Tisn't real—'tisn't the true thing—only playing at it. Love don't twitter. It eats you alive. All the small talk of the bar be drivel. It frets me sometimes to hear you answering back the fools so quick and pert. Clever, no doubt, and smart and all that. But I hate it. There's no dignity to it. Yet, when you get back on this fool or that, I see Charlie grin all over his face, as if he was proud of you. But I ban't proud of you. I despise you for it."

Her colour rose.

"If you despise me, I'd like to know why I'm walking with you now? I've got to earn my living, and I'm earning it honest, and a barmaid isn't paid for keeping her mouth shut and looking like a death's-head behind the counter. She's got to be cheerful and ready, and she's got to know how to please the fools, because nine out of every ten men who come to hotel bars are fools."

"Why are you a barmaid then?"

"Why are you a farmer? You told that old woman to mind her own business just now. And I tell you the same."

"That's right," he said. "Now we're on bedrock, and that's where I like to be when I'm

talking to man or woman. You tell me my faults and see if you can tell me one I don't know about; and I'll tell you yours."

"A cheerful subject for a Sunday afternoon."

"Not cheerful—cheerful things be all wind in the trees. Let's be real and see how we like it. Your great fault is that you're too impatient. You want things to happen all in a minute. You rush at your work. Does a week go without you've broke a tumbler or two? You wash up carelessly, and then you look at the broken glass as if 'twas its fault and not yours that it scats abroad. You want to have your own way all the time. And you don't think none the better of them that thwart you."

"Well! I'm hearing things!"

"Deny it," he said.

She considered.

"I'm impatient, yes."

"And you want to lead. You wouldn't be led. That's why you let Trevail take you out so often. You can trundle him this way and that, like a child trundles a hoop. You can trundle him to the top of Cosdon, though he hates the place. Dartmoor's too plain-spoken for him. Does he satisfy you? I'll swear he don't."

"You're a cleverer man than I thought," she answered irrelevantly.

"Not clever—only cunning. I've seen a lot of women that go down on their knees when they see you coming and ask you for the love of God to pick 'em up and kiss 'em. Hateful toads!"

"I didn't know there were any such women left."

"Here and there. But you're different. Pity's a vile thing."

Her eyes flashed.

"I was very well educated and I've read a great many books. And I've learned that you've got to live your life to yourself. I wouldn't sink myself to be any man's slave. And as to pity—what decent-spirited woman will stand that from anybody?"

"All the same, your tame women have a better time than the fighting sort."

"What does a wife want to fight for?"

"Ask 'em! They'll tell you. There's not a wife ever I knowed wasn't called to fight sooner or later. That is if they happen to be married to a man. And, same way, if a man marries a woman and not a piece of putty, the sparks must fly sometimes. If I married a woman——"

"You!"

"Yes, me. Be that a thing unthinkable?"

"I should never have thought you'd feel to want one."

"I said 'if.' If I did, she'd learn what 'will' means, and I'd expect to see her flash back—and hit back if need be."

"A pretty unquiet sort of life."

"Yes—there's only one thing I hate like hell, and that's tameness. Me and 'Iron' Pike are the same there. If we weren't life-long enemies we'd be close friends. We've brought a bit of salt into each other's lives and shall bring more yet. I've got youth on my side. But he's worth fighting—I will say that for him. The fur flies when we meet."

She did not answer and he returned to the starting-point.

"Us was talking of you. Well, I guess you'd have no use for a strong man, because you're shaping for a strong woman yourself. Come a

few more years and you'll get crusted over and baked hard by the fire of life—then, from my point of view, you'll be over-cooked and spoiled. But perhaps you'd be happier so yourself; 'twould be pleasanter work to reign over a weak man than be reigned over by a strong one."

She laughed.

"You seem to reckon there's no such thing as fair give and take in marriage then—that 'tis all ruling or being ruled?"

"I don't know nothing about it and maybe never shall; I only speak what I see around me. Wedlock! Damn the word! It sounds to me like a rat-trap going off. You expect to hear something shriek the minute you've used it. And oftentimes something does."

"You've thought a lot upon it seemingly?"

"Yes. I've watched it in life and you've read about it in story books. And so we've come to have a different view."

"Did you ever care for a woman?" she asked; "not that you need answer if 'tis too close a question."

He replied indirectly.

"I shouldn't answer if I didn't please. Perhaps I can't ezacally say. But this I'll say, I'm a man that could rise to a pretty good height of love, but not single-handed. I'd want the woman to help. I couldn't worship a woman, no matter what she was, if she hadn't nothing to give in exchange. I'd never pour out my best for a woman if she'd got nothing to give back and no use for my gifts. I'd give all I've got—all—all, but I'd want all she've got for it."

"Some women have got so little to give," said Lizzie.

"Right! You've found that out? And some have got less than a little. Still, we can't demand more than all, and the sort of woman that I'd be like to care about would be enough for any sane man."

"More than enough may be?"

"Not for me. She might swamp a smaller pattern of man, but not me. I've got more to give than any woman born could give again."

From a strange expression of active interest her face broke into laughter and her eyes sparkled.

"You're on pretty good terms with your powers, to be sure!" she said.

"Yes, I am."

"And heart-whole still?"

He did not answer this.

"Take a halt here," he said. "That's Blackavon Brook. It flows from the east of Raybarrow Pool to Blackavon Hole. 'Tis a nice lonely place with a good holt here and there for a man to hide and think."

"You come here?"

"Yes, I do, when I've got a spare hour sometimes and a weight on my thoughts."

"You don't take your troubles to other people?"

"You know I don't. Fifty to one when you get good advice it jumps contrary to your own will, so you don't take it."

"You'd never let no woman really share your life then for all you say she would?"

"What's that to do with it?"

"Everything to the likes of some of us. If a man took me and kept me outside of things, I'd not stop with him."

"You girls with your 'ifs' amuse me. So easy to be wise afore you fall in love and so difficult to

be afterwards—till you fall out again. When you love a man there's no more 'ifs' in the case. Everything goes by the board then—and ought to. Why, 'tis the test of the size of love—the giving up every other damn thing and casting the rest of life to the wind for a man. I hate the mean, measuring sort of love that only reaches to marriage. Marriage! as if anything wrecked and choked and strangled love like marriage does. Whoever loved truer for that? Whoever loved longer for that? Love dies, like every other mortal thing, and marriage be only an unclean way of keeping the stinking corpse above ground so often as not. But, if I had my way, I'd say to the men and women, 'When love's dead, bury it and part, and don't let the poison of a festering thing make your lives foul.'"

"That's all right," answered she. "A very fine idea, but it won't get you a wife. Only I don't suppose you want one. You go to a girl and say, 'I love you, but when we're tired of one another we'll part.' Well, how many would think that good enough?"

"None—just because they don't think at all and were never taught to do so. But I'd say to all women, 'Don't let love fool you.'"

"You're like to go a bachelor then."

"Wrong again. I'm the pattern of man that can marry, because I don't change. If all was like me, marriage would do very well and breed no misery. Once such a man as I am loves he don't change."

"And I don't change neither," she said. "If I was to love a man, there'd be no changing—not if he didn't change."

"There you are—another 'if.' You wait; you

keep off saying what you would be and what you wouldn't be till life shows you what you can be. I know myself, because I've been a lonely man and had plenty of time to study the mud I'm built of; but you don't know yourself, because no woman ever does, and no woman ever yet guessed how high or how low she could go till the hour come and astonished her."

"You've thought in your time," she said.

"And you've read, and I'll back thinking against reading. What *you* want is a fair, average, well-looking, well-to-do man who'll rip open his heart for you and let you go in. You'll not be hungry for outside credit so long as he gives it to you; you'll care little about praise so long as you have his; you'll be content for the world to say he's a clever one, so long as he never tires of telling you that 'tis all your work. So you'll be likely to fix on a weakish man, and he'll be lucky; but you won't. You'll do a bit for him, I grant, but what will he do for you? And what will be the end of it? Why, you'll come to despise him, and then he'll get wind of it that you do, and then he'll grow restive, and——"

"Not if we loved proper. I want to do my share in any home that ever comes to me. Can't there be fair give and take? Can't the man do his work and the woman do hers?"

"Yes, but not often. Few be built so steady and even of temper as to mind their own business and let t'other partner do the same. You ban't, for one. You'd have advice ready for every happening and opinions for every day of the week—Sundays included. You're a very fine character—the sort that's nearly always squandered on a poor make of man. And you'd rule from the

outset, and your sweetness would be lost, and your strength would increase, and you'd end by being a shrew—tied to a sly husband. I've seen it; and if you open your eyes wide enough you'll see it—at the Oxenham Arms afore a year be gone. Let the strong go to the strong, and let the weak strangle the weak; let the dead bury their dead and drop into the grave after 'em."

"Shouldn't a woman want to bring something to her marriage?" she asked. "You're a long way behind the times if you think women are contented to be nought but wives nowadays."

"Glad of it. The more the better. They'm screaming to be man's equal, I'm told—some of 'em; and the louder they scream, the more it appears that they ban't his equal and never can be. Men know you don't get things by screaming for 'em. The women taught them that afore they weaned 'em. But they can't larn it themselves seemingly."

"'Tis the beautiful plan of share and share alike that I'd wish to take part in. I'd be unhappy to have nought on hand but keep my husband's house tidy and mend his clothes. Surely to God no proper man would care for a wife that could do no more than that?"

He looked at her with a fierce, almost ravenous expression, but her face was from him and she did not see it.

"Leave it," he answered abruptly. "I've troubled you enough. I've not got the wit to say clever, kind, useful things to women—or men either. Do 'e see those birds? They mean that winter is on the way."

Along the brown hill, like a galaxy of stars, there flashed a flock of plovers with the sunlight

glinting under their wings as they flew and wheeled together.

"You think you begin to know the Beacon," he said. "You know nought yet. Summer's but a mask for truth up here. Us'll see what you think of it come the New Year. 'Tis only a place for cheerful folk just now; but wait."

"I'm waiting. It won't frighten me."

He fell into a silence then and they walked some way without speaking. At the edge of the great mire called Raybarrow they stood awhile and he told her stories of the Moor—mostly tragic. And yet with all his asperity and bluntness she felt no fear or distrust of him. She knew that he was stronger than she. He was a tonic—salutary perhaps in small doses, suffocating in large ones. She told herself that a little of Reynold Dunning would go a long way. But she was glad to have him for a friend. He taught her the charm of contrast. A dozen times she set him, in her mind's eye, beside Charlie Trevail and felt the extremity of their opposition.

She amused herself with a few little tests. A belated tuft of bog heather made a pearly pink jewel at the edge of Raybarrow Pool. It was separated from the firm ground by a tract of bog, but Lizzie affected not to see this.

"Could you get me that bit of heather, Mr. Dunning?" she asked, pointing to it.

"Don't you see the bog between?" he asked.

"Never mind if 'twill wet you."

He looked at the heath and then regarded the waste all round it.

"Can't be done," he said curtly. "If you'd used your eyes half a minute you'd see it couldn't."

"Mr. Trevail would have got it."

"Yes, we know that."

They turned northerly, because Elisabeth expressed a wish to visit certain old stone rows that stretched there. For a time they spoke on general subjects, then, suddenly, without warning, he returned to the flower.

"Never waste your time asking me to do silly things. I won't do 'em. 'Tis no sign of a man's respect for a woman to humour her foolishness. When you be feeling silly, go to Charles Trevail—he'd stand on his head 'pon top of Cosdon for 'e, I dare swear. But I wouldn't. If you want sane things done for you, and 'tis in my power and in my reason to do 'em, I will—cost what they would."

"Mr. Trevail is sane enough too."

"Sizes too small, I tell you—sizes too small that man for you. There'll be a misfit if you take him."

She did not know whether to be gratified or angry at this. Upon the whole she felt annoyed and grew impatient. She determined to show another side of her mind, because she felt it would irritate Dunning.

They came to those remains of neolithic man's work locally known as the 'Cemetery.'

"I love these stones," she said. "I make up stories in my mind about 'em and, after a time, I get to believe the tales. I know there are all sorts of things that haunt the Moor. They see us, but we can't see them, though we can feel them."

She expected an explosion, but none came.

"You'm as like to be right as anybody else. I thought once that I saw my dead mother coming to meet me. Then a thorn rose out of the fog,

and I marked 'twas just a trick; but I never laugh at another person's hidden things, so long as they don't laugh at mine."

"And have you got hidden things too, Mr. Dunning? I'd love to hear tell of them."

"I wonder if you would?" he said.

"'Tis strange what men think silly or think sensible. Mr. Trevail only laughed at me but once, and 'twas when I said I believed in ghosts."

"Let him laugh. He'll see ghosts too some day."

They wandered for another hour upon the eastern side of the Beacon and then returned to Clannaboro'.

A tea not sumptuous awaited them, and neither talked much while they ate it. Mrs. Vallance and her husband, Noah, joined them at this meal, and the old people chattered freely.

Lizzie noticed that neither had any fear of their master.

She asked Dunning to accompany her home and he agreed to do so.

"I'll go so far as Red Wheal," he said.

They set out presently, but he spoke little, and for once she found herself talking to him instead of listening.

When he had gone she considered the experience, and was surprised to find how intimate had been their speech. She found it in her to pity him for the things he lacked. But she abstained, remembering his estimate of pity.

Trevail came to the bar that evening, stayed till closing time, and asked her many things concerning her walk with Dunning. But she told him little and regretted that he had appeared so closely upon her experience with the other.

CHAPTER IX

TIME PASSED and winter came, not as a turbulent conqueror, but shyly, with slow approach and a tentative frost or two forgotten at rise of the sun.

By Horders Wood under Cosdon was an old wall that bounded a copse of wind-dwarfed spruce, fir and beech. Here offered many a snug and protected nook in the fern. Whortleberries and heath fledged the wall, and above it hung ripe scarlet harvests of the rowan. It was in this place that Trevail usually proposed to stop when he walked with Elisabeth; but she must needs always clamber to the top of the Beacon before she was satisfied. Sometimes the woman refused all escort and went her way alone.

She did so now on a day in December. There was a little cottage by Horders Wood where dwelt Miss Fanny Cann, and thither Lizzie meant presently to go, that she might drink tea with the spinster. The elder liked her and was glad to see her when she cared to call. Great matters were in the girl's heart and she wanted advice, or imagined that she did.

She had seen more of Dunning and much more of Charles Trevail. She was practical and not blind to the situation. She understood now that both these men loved her and that either would

marry her if she desired it. What she did not know and could not see was the different standpoint from which they regarded her.

Reynold Dunning, to his own fierce amazement, loved her, and the love of her mastered his spirit. He perceived her fineness and courage. What he loved in her was just the thing that a little discomfited his rival. Trevail loved too, with the full strength of his milder nature; but it was not for those traits attractive to Dunning that his heart was lost to Lizzie. Indeed, he wished she was a little more like other women in her mind, while so superior to them in loveliness of body. He adored the things she did; but her resolute ambitions, and a certain tempestuousness of soul that manifested itself sometimes, left him uneasy. Dunning loved her character; Trevail was mastered by her charm; the one hungered for her strength; the other yearned for her sweetness.

Elisabeth did not speculate as to what drew them; she only weighed their relative virtues and merits and her own emotions with respect to each. Dunning was the rarer lover and a man to boot; but the weakness of Trevail appealed more to her than the strength of the other. It left wider scope for her own part on the stage; she came from Trevail with a cheerful conceit of herself; from Dunning in a mood somewhat self-conscious and cast down. She liked Trevail's love-making in its humility better than Dunning's in its bluff imperiousness; but against that she knew the praise of Trevail was to the other's a field of daisies to the sudden sparkle of a rare wild flower. She knew that she might be immensely valuable to Charles Trevail, but hardly to Dunning. He

could only be valuable to her. She admitted that much in some moods; but not even that much always. As times she denied him all value higher than that of a sermon.

She had continued to make feminine experiments to learn which man was the quicker to do her bidding and take trouble for her; and she found the initial test of the heather held good in greater things. Trevail would make himself ridiculous on her account with the blind unconsciousness of a dancing dog; but Reynold Dunning rebuked her if she sought to put any slight on him.

"Laugh at fools, if you think 'tis worth while," he said; "but you shall never laugh at me."

She quarrelled with him once bitterly on the subject of Trevail, and she went to Trevail very sore from some harsh, cathartic speeches that angered as much as they hurt her. And Trevail, not knowing or guessing the reason of her trouble, was gentle and soothing, and offered to do unnumbered heroic things on her behalf—if she would but tell him what they were to be.

So she stood between them and guessed that she might make the weak man stronger, and believed that the strong man was beyond woman's power to change. She made the mistake of supposing that a weak man is easier turned from his weakness than a strong man from his strength. She guessed in what particulars she would alter Trevail. That was an obvious and a beautiful task; but the alternative offered a harder problem and therefore a more interesting. How would she alter Dunning—even if she could? The theme often occupied her, often even amused her.

She was thinking of it now as she climbed the

Beacon alone, and she laughed to herself—a little, short, sudden laugh, like a chaffinch's song. She saw no light there and turned to the pleasure of the hill.

The rough road climbed between dry-built walls among little fields reclaimed off the lower slopes of Cosdon. Most of these crofts stood under permanent grass, and at one corner of each there squatted a little rick, with a heavy stone or two to keep down the thatch and a gash on the windward side, where it had been carved into for hay. Seen afar, the walls hung like a tattered grey net on the bosom of the hill; many were ruined where Cosdon had made a counter-stroke and won again some outpost from the armies of man. Lizzie rejoiced to mark civilisation beaten back in this fashion, for her sympathies were with the inviolate spirit of the mount.

Chance visitors had found the winter waste desolate and forbidding. In its stern, brumal coat Cosdon rolled all dun and drab, lit only by the ash-coloured pallor of dead heath-bells and livid grass. Water-logged, lifeless, dark, the hill ascended under a low sun, that now seemed to creep in the actual arc of the Beacon—to follow its rise, hang at noon above its loftiest barrows and then slide westerly by its descent into night again. To-day the air was full of moisture and the top of the hill burnt in a radiant, silvery mist of cool fire. Lances and shafts of light broke briefly along the crest of the hill. But the fog shredded away before Elisabeth reached it, and the splendour of that afternoon was not with Cosdon, but with the world spread out beneath.

A magnificent and dusky earth met her gaze. It was swept with grey rainstorms and lighted by

windows in the high clouds, through which fell broad fans of pale sunshine, chilled by the sodden heaviness of the air. The light roamed from west to east over the surface of the land and rolled onwards, like a flood rather than a fire, through the midst of the prevalent gloom. Earth heaved to her knaps and knolls, fell again to her coombs and valleys and deep, river-haunted denes; but a great darkness and heavy pressure of atmosphere was upon her. Her forests were painted in colours of purple; her fallows and fields in umber and lead. All were washed together and harmonised by passages of gloom, where uplifted Exmoor mingled afar off with the clouds of a storm. The thick air released the light reluctantly, and Cosdon presently stood almost pallid, by contrast with a sinister blackness to windward. So dark were the approaching clouds that the wayfarer, while she rejoiced at the tremendous sight spread out above and beneath her, yet turned her back to the coming storm and made haste to descend where shelter might be found. Now the Moor rolled darkly to her feet, unlighted save for the wan flicker of granite dust upon the pathway.

Elisabeth made haste and had reached the cottage where Fanny Cann lived before the storm broke. The spinster, who liked her well, now extended a great hair-tagged jowl to be kissed. Then she marked Lizzie's colour and panting bosom.

"What a girl—to go dancing up there this weather! You'll do it once too often and be caught in a scat as will drown you and give you your death very like. All the same I'm glad to see you aloft there. It gives them a lesson. They

think women be afeared of the Beacon in winter, and what I say and always shall say be just this: that women fear nought that man don't fear, and he fears a lot they never will."

"You've got no use for men, Miss Cann?"

"No, I have not—know 'em too well. It makes me mad sometimes how they trample; but I'll tell you why 'tis: they've got the wit to band together. All the feeble sort of creatures—like sheep and grass-eating things in general—band together. And that's their strength. If men didn't band against us we should be all over 'em and they'd find themselves in their proper place again. 'Tis a sin and a shame that we go under like we do, for there be more of us than them."

Miss Cann took breath and then proceeded on her favourite subject.

"But the time is coming. I see signs. They be awake to their danger and our power at last. The old way of bowing and scraping to us, and then winking behind our backs to one another—that's all gone. They won't take off their hats to us much longer; they'll have to take off their coats to us instead. Our turn be coming."

"You do run on so, Miss Cann, but I'm sure they're not all what you think them."

"Be sure of nought where they're concerned save this: that man and selfishness be two words for the same thing. Take love-making itself—and that's about the only business where they even pretend to lift us above themselves—what is it? Only a trick to do what they can't do without us. They'm made terrible uncomfortable at such times, because Nature's at 'em for all she's worth, to hand on their ugly images to the next generation.

And then, afterwards, they just sink back again into the banding wretches they are, and creep off to their games and pubs as before, and haven't got no more use for their wives and children than Nature have got more use for them. Perched up here I see these things, and I tell you the cold, bitter truth."

"'Tis rather unlucky you're so set up against the men to-day," declared Lizzie, "because, before all else, I wanted your advice about two of 'em."

"Two, or ten, or ten thousand, my opinion will be the same."

"But I don't think as you think, and I hope very much for a home of my own some day."

"Well, I've got a home of my own, haven't I?"

"I want to be married, and I should be very sorry indeed to keep single," said Lizzie.

"You're frank. I should have thought now that seeing them from behind a bar was like to choke a woman off them pretty near quicker than anything?"

"But you're large-minded; you won't mind giving me a bit of advice."

"The people sensible enough to give good advice be generally sensible enough to give none. 'Tis like the matter of health. I never will touch it with man or woman. Because if they be fools, you'm only wasting your time, and if they be wise, you'm only wasting theirs. However, I'm thirty years older than you, if not more, and I'll very willingly let you have my opinion, because you're a dear maid and I like you."

They ate and drank; then the younger stated her case.

"There are two men want to marry me. It

may seem vain to say such a thing, especially as neither of them have asked me yet, but I know the signs. What woman don't? It comes naturally to us to know them."

"And one's called Dunning and t'other's called Trevail."

Lizzie nodded.

"Couldn't keep secrets from you if I would," she said. "Perched up here, you look down at Zeal, and nothing's hidden. They are both very nice men, I'm sure, but very different, of course."

"Caterpillars and wasps be different," answered Fanny, "but they'm both varmints and both alike in thinking of nobody but themselves, from the time they get up in the morning till the time they go to bed at night. Dunning and Charlie are pretty fair samples of pretty common sorts. The one's a pushing, driving, hard-headed, hard-hearted chap, as I never thought to see bowled over by any woman; and the other's an easy, simple soul, as don't know his luck and just lives at the beck and call of that monster of a man, his uncle. Trevail's only a creature of Pike's. He belongs to Pike body and soul. He wouldn't no more dare do anything on his own account, without asking, than a two-year old child will dare to go very far from his mother."

"He's quite free and independent. He farms his uncle's land and pays rent. But he's not bound to him except in the way of gratitude for all he did for him when he was a friendless orphan child."

"He belongs to 'Iron' Pike body and soul," repeated Miss Cann, "and if he says different, you wait till you know better and satisfy your own

eyes. Charlie's all right. I ought to praise him from my point of view, because he's milk for babes, and any woman, such as you, could do what she pleased with him."

"You think Mr. Trevail's weak?"

"So do you," answered Fanny. "Leastways, you don't think about it: you know he is. And you'm strong, and that's why he draws you. And as for t'other, he's not weak, no more than a bull is weak. He's got all the male faults and he spurns us, and I know what I think of him exactly. But the point of view is different. You want to be married and mean to be, I suppose. I've got to look at Dunning now—not as one of them; but as a husband for you."

"Yes, and Trevail the same."

"And Trevail the same. And now I'm not true to my own colours, because for me not to say 'Marry Trevail and be the grey mare,' is to be false to my own opinions. And yet—yet, Lizzie, when it comes to practice, marriage means the happiness or misery of a woman every time. And—well, there it is—I want your happiness, and I believe for the minute the women of your generation be happier doing the old work. I blush to say it—I wouldn't say it to another soul. But I do say that Dunning, though he's a brute, might love properly, so far as a man knows how, and even love lastingly—that is so long as he had the mastery. But Charlie never would have the mastery, because he's not built to master anything, and where they haven't got the mastery, they be always uncertain and troublesome. You look at my nephew Tom. Afore he wedded, that man hadn't a secret from the sun. But he have now. Minnie's got a lot to larn yet. And that's

why I say that, though it may be better for their natures to be under our dominion and taught their places, yet they've a nasty way of getting back on us. Between these two men, Lizzie, you've got to choose, and one you'll rule and one will rule you. 'There 'tis in a nutshell. The ruled man soon forgets how to love and, so like as not, goes somewhere else to be taught again; and the ruled woman—well, more shame to 'em, they're often happy enough."

"Is there no middle way? Can't husband and wife give and take?"

"Yes, it happens—about so often as an eclipse of the sun happens."

"But suppose I want to marry one?"

"Marry Dunning," said Miss Cann. "If wed you must, take him. I like Charlie best, and so do you, I believe, but marry Dunning if you want even to be a happy woman ten years hence. Of course you won't, I know that. 'Tis enough for me to have said 'Dunning' for you to go to t'other. You think you're strong enough to lift him up and make a man of him. But you're not. 'Make men of 'em!' what twaddle we females tell! They don't talk about making women of us. No—all they do most times is to make fools of us, and that's been easy from the first."

"You say Mr. Dunning?"

"Yes, and I say further that, when the time comes, 'twill be Charlie. Perhaps it was just because I knew you was bound to run counter that I named t'other. The weak man will be rich some day—unless he falls out with his uncle."

"You know well enough I'm not thinking about their riches; I'm thinking about them."

"Well, go on thinking," answered Fanny.

"My experience is that the more you think of them, the worse they shape under it. Go on thinking, and perhaps, before either of 'em offer, you'll have thought them into their proper places and decided against both. And they be thinking of you no doubt; and I daresay if you could but look into their minds and see how they thought of you, that would decide you against the pair of 'em quicker than a flap of lightning."

They talked awhile longer, and then, at night-fall, the guest went her way conscious that Miss Cann's advice had left her cold.

A man was standing smoking at the bottom of the lane from Cosdon, where the high road girdled the hill.

"I thought you'd let me just see you back from here," Trevail said. "I feared you'd be vexed, but I've risked it. Hope you'll excuse me."

She was gracious. His gentle but masculine voice stroked her ear pleasantly after the vibrating tones from the cottage aloft.

"I've been drinking tea with Miss Cann," she told him.

"Yes. Her great misfortune in life have turned her acid."

"Her great misfortune?" asked Lizzie.

"Why, yes—can't you see she's one of those creatures muddled in the making? She ought to have been born a man."

"She'd kill any man that told her so," answered Lizzie.

They laughed together rather foolishly.

CHAPTER X

TO THE EAST of the kilns the immense embouchure of Mr. Pike's limestone quarry broke the hill. The surface line was a long ridge inclined upward under grass lands, and below, riven earth showed all the secrets of her bosom. Here dragged in parallel lines upward, here dipping abruptly, here broken and crumpled every way upon itself in folds and wrinkles, the limestone ran. Like sand in an hour-glass, great mounds of earth spread out from faults and fissures in the face of the cliffs. The trend of the strata was always upward, but its progress had been broken by lateral and fundamental pressures so that beautiful loops and semicircles and precious patterns had been drawn upon the quarry faces. The layers and ripples rose and fell, billowed, like broken waves of a turbulent sea, sank again into the severe, ascending lines of the mass. Manifold hues made rich work upon the quarry, but the prevalent tones were sepia and russet, brightening to rose above, and darkening to blue-black streaked with silver below. The upper cliff was barred and banded like an agate; the lower showed the limestone veined with pure white quartz, all clean and bright where the last blastings had left its faces bare.

Sunlight playing among these rifts and scarps

imparted a glittering radiance to them, and proclaimed that marble was chief component of the whole. Shining indeed they could be, but the quarry was a haunt of shadows and mystery when days grew dark, and when, at gloaming time, the sudden voice woke echoes or loosened a stone. Then whispers and murmurs and counter-murmurs seemed to speak of other life, close hid through the working day.

Hither came Elisabeth Densham on the occasion of her weekly holiday, and with her was Trevail. The circumstances of her life caused courting to take place in the open air. Indeed she liked it better so, and was never within doors when she might be out.

Now the farmer showed her the wonders of his uncle's quarry, and he dwelt on the price of lime and the process of burning it, while she, faced with the writhings and throes of this marble hill in the making, cared not for industrial details. These frozen convulsions thus gigantically revealed, by pick and dynamite, impressed the woman. Her nature turned to large things and the quarry attracted her.

"I knew you'd like it if I once got you down here," he said. "'Tis just the sort of rum, savage old place you do like. You'll find hobgoblins and all sorts of queer devils here come presently. All that brown rubbish atop of the limestone makes it expensive work. 'Tis called the 'overhang' and is worthless, but as more and more of the limestone is got out the overhang has got to come away, or else 'twould fall and kill people."

"The quarry is full of queer faces," said Lizzie. "You see where that dead tree hangs

out? If you look just under, there's a horrid thing like a monkey poking its head from between two rocks."

But he could not see it.

Reduced to the size of dolls a dozen men worked beneath them, for they stood over against the quarry on high ground and looked across into it. The midgets below crept about upon the broken places, and some toiled at the bottom, and some, tethered by ropes to crowbars, worked aloft and hammered holes for explosives. The ring and clink of steel upon stone rose musical from the depths, while another sound was uttered by the dull and hollow drumming of great hammers, that smashed the fragments of the latest blast from the kiln.

"They look like mice in a great ripe cheese," said Lizzie, and Trevail applauded the simile.

"You clever girl! Whoever but you would have thought of such a thing? We'll go now and see the kilns if you've had enough of this."

"Not nearly enough," she answered. "'Tis a wonderful place. I should dearly like to come here by night, when all the men have gone. I'll get fond of it presently. I'll find the faces of friends and enemies looking out at me. I love to make my own flesh creep a bit sometimes. I like a spice of danger to a thing, as you know."

"Well, I don't, and I wish you didn't. Give me comfort and security. My farm lies up yonder; you can see the roof."

Lizzie had visited North Combe on a previous occasion, with Ned Startup and his betrothed. She was reminded of this as Trevail spoke, and the recollection put another fact into her head.

"Have you heard that Nelly Joep and Ned are

going to be married at Easter? 'Tis all settled. She will leave us then, but Ned is going to stop on. They've taken a very nice cottage at Tawton."

"Hope they'll be happy. I wish to God——" He broke off. "Come and see the water-wheel and the kilns now. Everything is worked by water. The trolleys are drawn up by it and the quarry is pumped by it. If the pumps weren't always going, the place would be under water in a month. That's what has happened to the old quarry, where my uncle keeps a boat and catches fish."

"Let's go out in the boat!" she said presently, but Charles hesitated.

"I think not. He wouldn't like it."

"Well, I would," she said, remembering a prophecy of Dunning's.

"Don't you want to see the kiln?"

"No, I want to go in the boat on the pond."

"Then you shall. Come on," he answered.

They approached the little tarn, and soon Lizzie sat aft on Trevail's coat in Abraham Pike's punt, while Charlie took the oars and paddled out into deep water.

The man was uncomfortable and his companion had leisure to note it. She sat and dabbled her hand in the dark water. The banks of the tarn were naked and a cold wind crept hither and thither in cat's paws on its surface.

They said little for a while, then Trevail spoke.

"What's the fun of this? I'm sure you'll get chilled to the bone."

She had seen a man running through the woods some distance off and knew that it was Pike. She rejoiced at this. There would be words, and the

attitude of Charles before the ferocious elder promised to interest her.

He spoke again.

"I don't know whatever my uncle would say to this," he declared.

"Don't you? Well, you soon will," answered Lizzie. "He's coming. I saw him on the top just now—running too. I expect he thinks some strangers have got his boat. No doubt he'll be in a grand rage."

The man showed great annoyance.

"I wouldn't have had this happen for——"

He broke off and began to paddle ashore. The struggle was at hand. She had it on her lips to bid him stop where he was, but, before she could speak, Abraham Pike stood on the bank and shouted to them.

He was very angry and did not pick his words.

"What the hell be you doing here, Charles Trevail? Ban't it enough as I ordered you to Okehampton this morning about they new gates? And you disobey there and you disobey here? You shall smart for this. You dare to break faith with me again and I'll cast you out, you lazy dog!"

"I should wait till he calms down a bit," said Lizzie, but Trevail was already paddling to the bank.

"He won't calm down," he said under his breath.

"Faster!" roared Pike. "Damn your cheek, taking women out in my boat, and wasting your time playing the fool! What next, I wonder?"

They came ashore and the rower helped Lizzie to land.

"If you wasn't a man, and supposed to be a respectable one, I'd fling you in the water and

trample on you for this," cried the elder. "God's light! What next—what next will you do? And you ordered to be in Okehampton for they gates. And, instead, you dare to come here and take my boat."

"I was going to Okehampton to-morrow. It was Miss Densham's afternoon out, and she wanted to see the quarry, and she wanted to go in the boat. Surely, uncle, where a lady's in the case?"

"Damn your lady and you too. Get going—get going, I say—now, this instant moment! And if you don't come in to me to-night and tell me they gates are in hand and to be here next week—if you don't do that, God's my judge but I'll turn you out of the farm!"

"To-morrow——"

"To hell with to-morrow! 'Tis always to-morrow with loafing rogues here. To-morrow you'll be homeless, so sure as the sun rises, if you don't go to Okehampton to-day. I'm tired of your ways—for ever mooning after this woman. And why do she keep you dangling—why? Don't you know? Then I'll tell you. 'Tisn't because she cares a cuss for you. She's not the sort to fancy a slack-twisted worm like you. 'Tis because she thinks you'll have my money, and she's a fool for her pains. And I tell her so to her face."

He stopped and snorted.

"Go on!" said Elisabeth. "I've never heard you talk before, Mr. Pike."

He glared at her.

"Don't you think to face me, you minx. Don't I know what you're worth—what you're all worth? Yes, you see yourself counting my money when

I'm gone. Gone! Be I the sort to go? They don't call me 'Iron' for nothing. Iron inside and out. I'll see him in the dust, and you too belike. My father lived till he was a hundred and got me when he was sixty-five! Now, begone you—to Okehampton, or you'll wake a pauper to-morrow."

Trevail looked at Elisabeth, as a naughty boy looks at his mother when his father is scolding him.

"You'll do well to go, Mr. Trevail," she said quietly.

He shrugged his shoulders, took off his hat to her and went without another word.

She was angry and humiliated, and she turned on the old man fiercely.

"Well may the people hate you," she said. "They were right, I see, and I was wrong. I've stood up for you till to-day. When they said the truth about you in the bar, I always doubted, because I'd only seen you there of a night—quiet, watchful, behaving decently, and only laughing in your sleeve at the fools. But now I know what you really are—a coarse, evil-minded old man, with nothing in his head but the nasty thought of how to get money. And never you dare to drag me into your speech again, because I won't have it! And I hate money, and if ever I took your nephew, the first thing I should try to do would be to make him brave and not frightened of your noise."

He stared at her.

"A chit like you can talk like that. Brave! Let me see the man that's brave afore the sight of a sovereign—or the woman either. You vain, ignorant little fool, what be the likes of you to

tempt a man away from money? Who'd starve in a ditch with you? Go back to your work and leave that young ass alone. I know him better than you do. Putty—putty—soft dough—clay in my hand. If I was to tell him never to see your face again, he never would. But I shan't do that. My willing slave and servant—that's what he is. A good uncle to him I've been, as he's told you no doubt. He's got some good points—a dog's virtues. A faithful chap and won't hear me abused."

He talked on and his anger abated. She was going, but he stopped her and bade her listen still.

"You said a bit back that you had withstood the slight men that thought and spoke ill of me. Well, go on doing it. Them as bend to me find me a very good sort of man. 'Tis only them I've broke here and there be rude. And the fault's theirs. I will have my way. I'm stronger than all of em' put together, and harder and cleverer. I move while they stand and gape; I strike afore they put their hands up; I wake while they sleep; I'm proud of myself, you see. Like a fox I am—oftener heard about than seen. Yes—I set the dogs baying, but 'twill take a strong pack to pull me down."

"You can't have it all your own way in this world, Mr. Pike."

"Depends—all depends. 'Tis only a question of cleverness. Brains can get anywhere, and brains and cash combined can only be stopped by God Almighty."

"D'you believe in God? I never should have thought it," she said.

"Yes, I do. Jehovah's my pattern. I never

do nothing in my small way He didn't do in His big one. He's the joker for me—strong, cunning, full of surprises, jealous as the grave—never forgetting. He strikes like the lightning! He's rage alive when He's crossed. Why, the devil's a worm compared with Him!"

She was interested.

"Mr. Dunning thinks much like you, but he doesn't believe in anything."

He raged instantly and his face blazed.

"Him! Between me and that man there's nought alike, and I'll wring your neck if you say there is. Believes nothing, don't he? Wait and see if he don't believe something afore I've done with him. Mark that—green girl as you are. Him and me can't breathe the same air, and he'll go under. I'm stronger than him. I'll teach him to believe and shake. He's my play and game, that man—the only bit of sport in my life. He's got home on me once or twice. He's worth fighting. I shall handle him when the time comes, as I've handled other men."

"He can strike too."

"Can he? Like the fledgling strikes when the jackdaw comes! I'll eat that man alive yet!"

"I shall tell him that," said Lizzie. "The poor chap ought to be warned."

They talked a little longer and then Pike left her with much to think about. She could not stamp out of her mind the sorry spectacle cut by Charles; but she found herself making excuses for him and she forgave him.

When, somewhat shamefaced, he entered the bar that night and began to whisper extenuating circumstances, she told him that she quite understood the position.

"It calls for a very strong pattern of man to resist such a person as your uncle," she said.

"None can—not one," he assured her, "and in my case 'tis more difficult than for another. He thinks a lot of me really, despite his scorn, and 'tis no good my angering him and making him an enemy."

She would hear no more upon the subject, but she thought long about it when the day was done. Waking visions kept her sleepless. She even saw herself pitted against 'Iron' Pike—fighting Trevail's battle for him, helping him to higher independence and self-respect, lifting him above this state of subjection. She felt strong enough to do so, even on the day that she had heard and spoke with the old ruffian.

Here was work worthy of her. She fancied that she already loved the man who could bring her such a task; but she deceived herself a little. It was thought of the task as much as the man that she loved.

CHAPTER XI

THE CHRONICLE OF ELISABETH at this period may largely be confined to her brief weekly hours of leisure. These advanced her life and brought its possibilities before her, but the daily round and task had lost its salt. She did her work perforce, yet there came into her manner of doing it something perfunctory, a shadow of indifference and a little abatement of the old active and willing spirit. Her own affairs seemed to intrude upon her labours. The impatience that Dunning had pointed out increased. She was taken to task by Minnie Underhill.

Lizzie confessed her sins and showed contrition. As the crucial point in her relations with her lovers approached, she experienced some fret of nerves, but she strove to keep this to herself, and succeeded in so doing save from one pair of eyes. Dunning understood, yet on the occasions of seeing him she found small consolation. He was salutary but never sympathetic. Trevail, on the contrary, adored her, and more than once the expected word hung on his lips. He got her to go for a walk again a month after the meeting with his uncle. The day was threatening and he urged against Cosdon.

"Come down in the valley by the river," he

begged. "'Tis lovely there and I'll pick you some primroses."

But she would not.

"Cosdon or nothing," she said.

"'Tis offering for a storm."

"Let it, who cares?"

"If you ban't afeared for your Sunday clothes——?"

"Not I. I'm sick for a breath of air."

"'Tis blowing a gale up there."

"So much the better. I want sweet air to-day and plenty of it."

"Where you are the air is always sweet," he said, but she was in no mood for compliments.

They set out then and he braced himself for the delayed task. He began by being personal, and his personalities were a failure, so he became discouraged.

"'Tis curious that you always seem like two people to me. When you're in the bar and work going on, you're like a queen, and you even seem to stand a foot taller, And you're that brave and ready and dashing, and always have the laugh with you, for none ever scores off you. In your black you reign over us all and we're as humble as beetles afore you. Even my Uncle Abraham only grunts. But when you come out, you're so quiet as a little mouse, and seem to grow smaller and be, in a sort of way, more near to anybody. You can't think what store I set upon these walks. 'Twas very kind of you to let me be a friend."

"Very kind of you to offer. Not much of the queen about me—in the bar or out of it. I'm only a very stupid girl. I'm in trouble too. Mrs. Underhill have been rapping me over the knuckles, and well I deserved it."

"I won't believe that."

"'Tis true, however. She was quite right. And Mr. Dunning warned me long ago. No self-control—I dash at things so."

"'Tis a virtue, not a fault. As for Mrs. Underhill, I should have thought you couldn't be too energetic for her."

"She's worth a thousand of me. Her mind is balanced. She's always fair."

He laughed.

"Ask Tom. He don't think so, I believe."

"Yes, he does—in his sensible moments."

"He tells you that; perhaps he tells some people different."

She did not answer. They were on the hill and the sky grew darker.

"D'you know," he said, "'tis a most curious thing that other girls, who are nothing to me, often come up in my mind's eye as clear as pictures—though I don't want 'em there in the least. But one, that I'm always trying to see, never comes. She won't. She tricks me you might say. I can't even catch a glimpse of her wonderful eyebrows unless they are right before my face."

"You told me all that last time we went for a walk."

The retort struck him into silence. Then he grumbled.

"What the deuce you can see in this water-logged desert of a hill I never understand. You must know every blade of grass up there by now—an ugly, black, bleak place. You can't pretend 'tis beautiful to-day."

"Truth is beautiful to me. This is all stark truth. As true as the wind that strikes through

your clothes and makes you shiver. It don't talk silliness about eyebrows anyway."

"What's worrying you?"

She did not answer but stood still and panted. She was unhappy, and a spirit of helplessness and darkness held her. She knew what was in his mind, but felt in no mood for him. It was an hour when his gentleness irritated her. She wished for once—for the first time in her life—that Reynold Dunning could take Trevail's place and apply some of his caustic to her bruises. She wanted to be hurt. She knew that pain only could cast out pain. The man looked at her reproachfully and sadly.

"You're not happy," he said. "I wish to God 'twas in my power to make you so."

A tear dropped from her eye and he saw it, and pretended he had not.

She fumbled for her handkerchief and he looked away. She yearned for no companionship then but the Beacon's self. That understood and could minister to every phase of feeling. Her few tears cheered her and soothed her mind. A beautiful spectacle presented itself close at hand and she marked it and pointed it out to Trevail.

A flash of sunlight breaking out of the storm-clouds along the hill's shoulder touched a dozen sheep that fed together some distance beneath the summit of the Beacon. They had the light behind them and, until this transformation, were dark as the waste on which they grazed; but a sudden thread of gold now flashed along each woolly back and outlined each horned head, so that every creature moved about in an aureole of pure sunshine. The flock had been almost invisible in the gloom of the heath until this ray

revealed them; now, outlined in delicate fire, they lent a great beauty to the stormy hill-side and softened the threatening desolation with their brightness.

"There," said the woman. "Never, never do I come up but I note some beautiful thing like that."

"Young Scotch sheep. The best for the Moor—those black-faced chaps. They belong to Dunning I believe—yes, there's his 'R. D.' on their sides."

"Don't you see they look fine?"

"Of course I do—with the sun on 'em; but now 'tis gone behind the clouds again. I wish you'd turn. We shall get a proper downpour in a minute."

"I want it. I don't care for anything to-day. I should like to be struck by lightning. I'm going to get to the top anyhow."

He restrained his impatience and went on.

"I'd never have thought you could have been so rash and wilful," he said.

"That's because you know nought about me. If Dunning was here, d'you know what he'd do? He'd take me by the shoulder and order me back."

"But you wouldn't go, I should hope?"

"Yes, I should."

"Well, I don't order, I only ask. I beg you to come down, Lizzie."

"I never told you that you could call me Lizzie."

"I'm going to, however, in future."

The remark pleased her better than anything he had said that day; but he knew it not, and she did nothing to show him.

"Men are all bullies," she said. "Miss Cann's

right there. You treat us like—— Here's the rain. I'm going to the top all the same."

The wind woke in a sudden, furious squall and sheets of grey rain swept them. For a moment they could not hear their voices; then he heard her shout to him.

"I love this! I'm better already. Things that are hard in the valley are nought on the hill."

She was very wet now and he felt troubled for her.

"'Tisn't at all wise for you to be soaked to the skin in this biting wind—Lizzie."

"'Twill do us good," she said. "Our life is too soft and easy. We think of nought but comfort—like everybody else down there."

She pointed to Zeal—a dim smudge in the rain beneath.

"If you want to put that little hole in its proper place, come up here."

"Come back to it anyway. You ban't a plover or a pony to stand this weather. I shall be feared to death now that you'll fall ill."

"Look down at the view," she said. "'Tisn't the time for silly talk about ourselves. The world's a grand world to-day and I'm sorry I was cranky."

Far away under the storm Exmoor shone in full sunshine like a picture painted in gold and opal, softened to unreality by distance and set in a frame of storm.

Trevail now asserted himself and made his companion descend. She was more cheerful, and he had grown rather glum. She decided that they should visit Fanny Cann, and he agreed to do so, but reluctantly.

"Much better you go home quick and keep warm till you can get out of these clothes."

"'Tis nothing but a drop of wet. I shall be dry again in five minutes by Miss Cann's fire. She likes me."

"She doesn't like me though."

"She thinks better of you than most men. She's talked to me about you."

He was interested.

"I'd have dearly liked to hear what she said."

Lizzie laughed.

"No, you wouldn't," she answered. "But all the same, as men have got to be, she'd sooner have them in your pattern than—some."

"Why's that?"

"You ask her."

They made haste down the hill and were quickly at Fanny Cann's. She rated them for their folly, and Elisabeth took the blame.

"'Twas all my fault. I wanted a breath of air. That stuffy it is in the valley sometimes."

"Yes, stuffy place and stuffy opinions. You get to the fire, Lizzie, and you take off your coat and put it near enough to catch heat, Charles. I'll brew the tea in a minute."

"And thank you, I'm sure."

"I was telling Mr. Trevail that you reckon he's a head and shoulders above many men, Miss Cann. And he asked me why, and I told him that you best know."

"You sly girl!"

"'Twas only truth."

"Bad's the best of 'em. Charlie have got fewer faults than most. But I daresay 'tis only because he hides 'em better."

"I haven't got any faults at all," declared the

farmer boldly. "That is, no faults that you ought to count faults. I think the world of your sex, and would serve 'em any day of the week."

"Your virtue isn't that. It lies in the fact that you're fairly easy to be turned and twisted. The more woman can do with men, the better for the nation; and if the world was full of your sort, we should be where we ought to be."

He considered this.

"You mean I couldn't refuse you anything. Be that sense in me or weakness?"

"According to the point of view," answered Miss Cann. "I say 'tis sense, and if you was married to some women I could name, your happiness would depend upon your easiness. If I had my way, no woman should be married that wasn't strong enough to rule her husband. Then, in a generation or two, we should be reigning."

"And for the same reason, I suppose, you wouldn't let the strong man marry?"

"Not if I could help it," she confessed. "But who can? They always find the soft, cow-like women, and so the female race is kept under."

They chatted and chaffed. Mr. Trevail argued for reciprocity, and declared that the man-like woman and the woman-like man were equally objectionable.

The rain was ended, and the dusk was clear when they set off for Zeal. The earth-born lights glittered and twinkled beneath them.

"Will you do me a large favour?" he asked. "'Twill cost you nothing and be a very great joy to me."

She thought he was going to beg for a kiss and felt in a mood to grant it now. The cloud had swept off her and she was happy. He had pleased

her during the last two hours. She loved him and she knew it. There was a mixture of masculinity and helplessness in him that cried out to her. If he had asked her to marry him at that moment she would have agreed to do so.

"Would you mind calling me 'Charlie'? I should feel very proud and flattered if you could do so. 'Twould show that you—well—I can't say exactly what it would mean to me, but it would mean a lot."

"Of course I will if you like."

"Thank you ever so much. It means a sort of closeness. It means—it points—but I'll say no more to-night. And you've forgiven me for calling you 'Lizzie' so bold?"

"Why ever should I mind? 'Tis always understood if a girl's got a friend, he does it."

"I should like to invent a beautiful, secret name for you that only you and me know."

She laughed at that.

"You're not clever enough, I expect."

"Give me leave to try then? Now, I'll lie awake all night seeing what I can hit upon."

He left her at the top of the hill that descends into the valley, and went his way, while she returned to the inn.

They met again that evening, however, for Trevail called to drink during the hours of company between eight and ten. He came explicitly to learn whether she was the worse for her wetting. In his heart he was there to hear if she would call him 'Charlie' before other men. Chance brought a good audience and among them his rival. There were present Lucky Madders the lime burner, Jack Jope, the shoemaker and father, half a dozen miners from Red Wheal, Ned Knapman, a local

sportsman with a doubtful reputation, and Mr. Pike, who sat in his usual corner and preserved his usual silence.

Tom Underhill was helping Lizzie in the bar, and the place hummed with noise and reeked with the smells of beer and tobacco.

To this throng entered Charles Trevail. Chance brought him beside Lucky, who was talking to a miner.

"I'll back limestone against your copper, my son," he declared. "To our quarry you know where you are and what you be doing; in your work, you can't tell one nor t'other. 'Tis all a speculation, and though you and your mates may be pleased and get your money very regular, I'd like to hear the opinion of the adventurers in the mine. What do they get?"

"Mostly nought," answered Mr. Jope. "But 'tis a very successful sort of mine—for everybody else. I haven't heard the 'venturers be drawing anything; but after all, they ban't everybody, and they've got the pleasure of knowing they be keeping a lot of men busy and a lot of women and children contented."

"There's a rumour of a dividender," said Mr. Knapman.

The vicissitudes of the enterprise occupied other tongues. Then Trevail changed the subject.

"I must congratulate you, Tom," he said. "Only heard the great news to-day. So you're to be a father."

Underhill nodded.

"'Tis so. And thank you."

"Here's good luck I'm sure. Give me a pint, please, Lizzie."

Others drank to the fortune of the publican's coming first-born.

Neddy Knapman ventured on a sly jest with Tom. "There will be a little peace about the house now—eh?"

But Underhill made no answer, though he smiled. Married life had changed him. He had become a more considerable person than of old, and a less happy one.

"Here's your drink—Charlie."

Trevail's heart jumped as she spoke, for the words were uttered with her usual clearness and all heard them. Above all one had just entered, and he, too, had marked the intimate appellation. Dunning most certainly heard, and a moment or two later Lizzie uttered the name again in asking her lover for his money. But the elder man took no notice and presently addressed her.

"You wanted to see a trout caught, didn't you? Well, I shall be fishing in Blackavon Brook this week, and can fit in the time if you'll tell me when you're free."

"I've changed my mind," she said.

"I want you to come, however, and you will, please."

Mr. Knapman intervened.

"You come along with me, miss, and I'll show you how to catch a trout."

"Shut up, Ned, and get out of the way," said Dunning. "I'm talking to her."

"Talking to her as if she was a plough-boy," said Trevail.

All expected a collision, and even Pike bent forward. To hear his nephew beard Dunning thus was good to him. But nothing came of the challenge. Apparently the master of Clannaboro'

had not heard it. He turned to Lizzie again, and it seemed his rival's reproof bore fruit.

"You know my rough, harsh way, and what's under it," he said in a voice that only she could hear. "Will you come? I should think it a favour."

But her mind was full of the other man. She felt she owed him something.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," she said. "What can I serve you, Mr. Dunning?"

"Half a pint of beer."

She drew it and he paid for it and drank it.

He next talked to Ned Knapman for a few moments on the subject of fishing. Trevail he entirely ignored until about to depart. Then he walked up to Abraham Pike and addressed the master of the quarry.

"I won't speak to yonder babbling, red-faced chap, your nephew, just now, because he's a bit above himself and 'twouldn't be fair, but you know me better than he does and you know my ways. You and me understand and can give hard knocks and take 'em. He ban't built for hard knocks, so he'll be wiser not to court 'em. But if he wants a quarrel, he's welcome. Only tell him not to be rude to me again afore yonder woman. It won't pay him. I'm a fair fighter, and I don't want to put that man in the sawdust of the bar under her eyes, because she's the sort would never forget that sight. But if he wants a turn up, he can always find me at Clannaboro'."

"I see," said Pike, "but you forget I'm his side, Reynold Dunning."

"Are you? I didn't know that. Well, you and me never waste words, and we never leave each other in doubt of our meaning. Sorry you

haven't got a better man to second. But you couldn't pull long with any first-rate man—too strong for that. You must rule. And so must I."

"You want that woman," said Pike. "And so does my chap. That's how it stands. More damned fools the pair of you. I can understand him, but you—I'm surprised!"

"Women, or quarries, or our neighbour's goods—we all want something and must be after something. 'Tis the salt of life, as none know better than you. Talking of quarries, you'll have trouble presently. You're wasting money there."

"Liar! What do you know about it that I don't?"

"Perhaps you'll live to find out. Then you'll dance a fine bear's dance to mark the fool you was. But you'll be too late then—when I get the quarry."

Having thus assumed the offensive and left 'Iron' Pike in a rage, Dunning went out. His enemy was roaring, and Underhill was trying to silence him.

"Whatever's amiss? Be your drink wrong?" he cried from behind the bar.

"That man—that beast! I'll have his eyes yet! To dare—such as him!"

"He's vexed you proper, I see," said Lucky.

"The quarry—the quarry—he dared——" Then Pike departed without more speech.

"Looks as if he'd like to knock Dunning on the head," declared Joep.

"No great loss if he did," answered a miner; "for a hatefuller pattern don't hang out in these parts."

The defects of the two men were contrasted, and Trevail did not hesitate to take his uncle's

side. He forgot the relation in which Dunning stood to him respecting Elisabeth Densham; otherwise he had not perhaps abused the other farmer so roundly. The woman liked him little for his attitude and presently silenced him by praising Dunning. Thus a good day ended badly and he left her conscious that his tongue had destroyed some of the precious work of the afternoon.

CHAPTER XII

LIZZIE WAITED in the quarry for Charles Trevail and he did not come. The day was Saturday, and the hour half-past three. She had the place to herself, and sitting on the high ground above the workings looked across at the sunny cliffs and followed her fancy. Sometimes she whistled and woke echo, and pictured the little spirits of the place peeping from clefts and ledges to listen; once she uttered a low cry and heard the note come back changed and saddened, like a wail of distress. She found a likeness, where accidents of frost and flood had flung upon the cliff a gigantic bas-relief of 'Iron' Pike. The discovery delighted her, and she longed to show it to the man himself.

He was fishing in his pond, and sat there motionless on the dark water in his boat. Round about, the woods were bursting with spring green, for winter was gone, and in the valleys sap and scent were rising to the sunshine of April.

Lizzie went down to the water presently.

"I've found the living image of you on a great rock in the quarry, Mr. Pike. Do come and see it," she cried to him.

But he waved her away.

"Be gone, you lazy wench," he said.

"Lazy!" she answered indignantly. "What next?"

"Why the hell don't you marry him and have done with it?" shouted Pike. "I'm sick of this fooling. Take him or leave him. He's not worth a curse to any man since you came here."

This onslaught effectually silenced Elisabeth. The old man bawled from the middle of the tarn and might have been heard a quarter of a mile off. She made no answer, but fled back to the quarry blushing and indignant.

"I should much like to know how a woman's going to take a chap before he asks her to," she thought. The incident ruffled her not a little, and she was in a gloomy mood when Trevail presently appeared, hastening down the valley from his farm.

She had grown to care much for this man now, because she knew that not only did he love her, but he was also influenced by her. He kept her alternating between moods of hope and despair. She hoped and was glad when he approved her sentiments, and declared that he won personal profit from them; she hoped when he told her that he had availed himself of her advice in sundry particulars, and was prospering in mind as a result of so doing. And she despaired sometimes before his own sentiments and slight ambitions and mean contentment. Above all she hated his subservient attitude to his uncle, and the spirit he displayed before the older man's stronger will and ferocious domination. He could not feel the tyranny and he would not see the figure that he cut under it.

The woman who loved him was accordingly elated and cast down. 'The mixture that is not

shaken, rots,' declared Heraclitus, and Elisabeth appreciated this truth, and felt that an inherent lethargy and leaning to all things easy and comfortable was the danger for Trevail. She strove therefore very energetically to shake him out of this lentor, this natural inertia and indolence of mind and body. Often she succeeded and often she failed.

To-day he was preoccupied and troubled about his concerns. He came to her for rest and peace, help and distraction. But she was out of tune herself. She made one effort to be cheerful and entertaining, and it failed.

"Come and see your uncle on the cliff," she said. "I've found his likeness large over the quarry. I'll show it to you."

But the sun had moved on his way, and the image of mingled rock and shadow was gone. Trevail began to grumble about the tenant of the quarry and she cut him short.

"'Tis always the same. One day you're smarting from him and feel like any other self-respecting man would; the next you go under and let him order you about like a dog."

He showed impatience.

"To tell a man to quarrel with his own bread-and-butter is rather silly in my opinion—not worthy of your sense anyway."

"You think everything's silly that doesn't fit in with your opinions," she said. "I hate your uncle, and so does everybody else. All the same, I admire him for one thing, and that's his power of getting his own way. But what I hate most of all is his opinion of you."

The man's pride was touched.

"If you're going to talk like that, I'll leave you,"

he answered. "Never was heard such nonsense. What do you know about his opinion of me? Should I be where I am, or what I am to him, if he felt for me—what you seem to? What have I done? Oh! Lizzie, don't say things like that. You forget them afterwards, but I don't. You know what I think of your sense, but what's the use of being—of being what we are to each other if you're going to get cross every time we have a difference of opinion? I allow other people to think as they please."

"No, you don't then—not me anyway. You know very well how you hate my liking for the Beacon. And when I humour you, and come down here instead, this is all I get for it."

"You puzzle me sometimes. But I'm always ready to learn. I grant I don't quite see what fun you get out of Cosdon. Then, why don't you explain? You tell me the Beacon means a lot to you. Well, what does it mean?"

"I can't tell you—and you wouldn't understand if I could."

"I know you think I'm a fool, but where you're concerned my brains move pretty quick. And what you won't tell me—what you think I can't understand, I'll tell you. I hate you to go up there, and, though you imagine it does you good, I know it does you harm. It puts your mind out of gear, and makes you see things different from what they are. It makes you contemptuous and impatient, and it makes you out of sympathy with people and your work and everything. Yes, I hate you to go up there."

"Then I'll go oftener," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It isn't for me to preach to you. You do the

preaching always, and God knows I've taken to heart many a thing you've said to me; but, after all, I've got eyes in my head if I haven't got brains in it, and—and—well, it isn't the time to say what you are to me. Cosdon don't make you happy; it makes you miserable and out of conceit with things as they are. You know that."

"Yes, I do. And that's why I go there—to breathe and see and look down and make things take their proper sizes. Mr. Dunning says the way to judge of people is to see what they seek or shun in the world; and if you see them running after small things, then you know they're small-minded; and Cosdon makes everything small. And I *will* be out of conceit with small things, even though I have got to live a small life myself. You're small-minded, and you know it."

"Say so and think so, then. And go to Dunning and see what he is and what he seeks and shuns. You'd better go and live on Cosdon I should think. There's no reason in you to-day and you've no right to talk to me so."

"Why do you stand it then? Why don't you go away? I don't want to talk to you. I hate this hole. Let me clear out and get up there!"

She pointed where the Beacon towered to the west of them. It swept in a right arc, broken at the summit by a flat cloud full of sunshine. The sides were dark by contrast; then in the middle-distance of the scene rose the rounded heads of elms, still rosy with their last inflorescence.

"Go where you please. I'm not company for such a high and mighty woman as you. I'll get back to work. I'm sorry—I'm cruel sorry things have fallen awry to-day. 'Tis all my fault. Good-bye."

He took off his cap and left her. She watched him go but did not call him back. She was in a hard mood and could only see his faults. Then, with his departure, her attitude changed and she forgave him and blamed herself. Who was she to take such a stand? Who was she to 'preach' to him? He had not used the word offensively; yet it carried great offence to her ear. She knew his patience with her was lovely and beautiful, but she hated it to-day. "Why did he say the fault was his and that he was sorry?" she asked herself. It was this humility and meekness that made her despair. She wanted impossibilities after the universal way. She desired the man to be strong and still easily influenced. She disliked the defects of his qualities. She did not object to his humility before her, but she resented his humility before others. To wed a humble man was a pleasant thought to her; but he must not take his humility outside his own door. She had a vague ideal of the knight of romance, a lamb with his lady, a lion in the world.

And now there came to her as she sat on above the quarry, not a lion, but him folk called 'the bear' of Clannaboro'. He had been standing for some time regarding the quarry from the larch woods that rose on the hills above it. Unseen, he had pursued his own thoughts respecting the place, and then, ignorant that Pike was fishing in his private preserve, Dunning had gone down and inspected the works. At the kilns he met and spoke with Lucky, who never took a half-holiday and might be seen, six days out of every seven, like a yellow beetle crawling about the unsleeping fire.

And now Dunning, back again at the edge of

the lofty woods and about to depart, caught sight of Elisabeth alone, growled a blessing on his luck and descended to her.

"Something told me I was going to see you to-day," he said. "But I don't believe in that nonsense, so I just turned my back on it and went my way. Yet it had to be."

"You didn't count to find me here, however?"

"No, I did not. If I'd given heed to the voice, I'd have gone aloft."

He pointed to the Beacon. Then he sat down on a stone not far from her.

She did not speak and the listlessness following her quarrel was upon her. He observed her mood, however, and seemed more cheerful than usual.

"Why for are you here?" he asked, searching her face.

"Why are you here for that matter?"

"Business. I'm interested in this place and shall be more so some day. You can keep secrets? Well, I mean to get the quarry away from 'Iron' Pike presently."

"You'll never do that. He thinks more of it than anything in the world."

"We shall see. I've had a few hard knocks from him. He's one of the fighting sort, and any weapon be good enough for his hand. I can't lie; if I could I should be the equal of him. But in the matter of craft he beats me. However, there's other ways to best him. And the first way is not to be frightened of the man. Everybody is but me."

"I'm not and he knows it."

"No, you're not, but you're a woman. He don't take them seriously."

"More do you."

He did not answer but repeated his former question.

"What are you doing here—all alone, too?"

"Thinking. I come here sometimes, because Charlie Trevail likes it."

"Does he? I should have thought 'twas too harsh and strange for him. I like it myself, therefore 'tis curious that he should."

"You think you're different from everybody else."

"I know I am—so do you. Different from him—in everything but one thing."

"What might that be?"

"You know."

She did not speak; then he came nearer to her.

"What are you ambitious for?" he asked.

"What is it you want? You've taught me a bit here and there since I knew you. Yes, you have. You're the most interesting creature that ever I met. And I often catch you in my thoughts. But what d'you want? D'you want to be the stem of a man's flower; or do you want the man to be the stem to your flower? D'you want to shine like the moon, or d'you want to shine on your own?"

She had often asked herself the same question.

"I'd like to help a man. I'd be the stem to his flower, and proud to be, so long as he knew it and felt it. I wouldn't marry a man that wouldn't be the better for marrying me."

"You ban't ambitious for yourself then?"

"Yes, I am. I'm ambitious to lift a man higher than he could get without me. The love that leaves a man as it finds him is nought. My love, if 'tis any worth, should lift him so that he'd

never be the same man after, and never think so humble, or do so humble again after once he'd wedded me."

He knew that she was thinking of Trevail.

"Could you do all that for a man?"

"Yes, and he'd do the like for me. I'm not proud of my strength. 'Tis weakness compared to a man's strength. If I married a man, I should look to him to do the man's part."

"Ah! 'Twould be weary work having to do all. A strong man is a fine thing in a woman's life—a man that never flinches, never changes, never falters. But you can't lift up each other, can you? One's got to hold the reins from the start. He or she must be the whip hand. Both can't have it."

"Then drop the whip and do without it. Who talks of whips nowadays? I say they can lift each other."

"'Tisn't possible."

"I'd make it possible," she said. "The first thing is a love large enough. If man and woman both love enough, they can do miracles."

"Love that size is a miracle. You hear of it, but you never see it."

"Those that can think it can feel it," she answered, and the reply loosened his spirit.

"By God! you're one in ten thousand. There's none like you and never was! Too good—too good—a million times too good for any that ever lived. Not worthy to black your shoes, none of us. I'll think better of all women for knowing you. I'll bear myself more kindly to all women for knowing you. And if you wait for the man that's worthy of you, you'll die a maid."

She stared at him, but a flush of joy touched her

heart. Grapes from a thorn had been a lesser wonder than such sudden splendid fruit of praise from Dunning.

"What's come over you?" she asked blankly, and her eyes looked widely upon him.

"You've come over me," he answered. "You've done what nothing but you could have done. You've opened my eyes to the thing that's better worth than anything else in this whole black-guard world. I've seen fairer women than you and I've seen wiser women than you. But I've never seen and never shall see anything like you. You've got fine thoughts. You've made me feel small sometimes. I love you. Come to me and I'll teach you what love like mine can do. And I'll learn what life can be, shared with such a wonder. Come to me, Elisabeth Densham, and teach me; and I'll teach you too. My larning be useful in its way. Come, and we'll see which shall lift t'other, as you say. I want you something terrible! I want to be fighting for you. I want to show you that you can't stand alone, though you think you can."

He ceased but she did not immediately reply. Her thoughts wandered and she found herself retracing the recent quarrel. He did not know of that, but he knew of whom she was thinking.

"Never," he said. "That man never can and never will be what I should be. Better perhaps, but different. He's a smaller pattern than me. You know that. He can fight too, you think. Yes, love makes man or beast brave for a while. He'd fight for 'e—in a feeble sort of way from under his uncle's wing. But he won't fight for 'e when he's got 'e. Remember that. You'll

have to fight for him. He'll cloy in the house. He'll—but I won't speak of him. 'Twouldn't be fair—I don't know him well enough. I love you and I want to marry you. I've kept it back till now, not for doubt of love but for doubt of myself. The better I knew you, the more I knew what you were worth—far more than I can offer in exchange. But you don't care for goods, or I shouldn't have cared for you. Can you think of it?"

She had a strange feeling that, but for the recent quarrel, she might have accepted him. Yet, in the face of what had just passed, her spirit told her that she could not in honour do so. Again she saw Trevail creeping away forlorn from her. She believed that a sort of treachery must lurk in going for ever from him to the other man at this moment. Right well she knew that Dunning would match her; yet she dreaded his power of will. She was proud to have won him; she throbbed to see him tamed at her feet. She liked him better now than she had ever liked him. But still he grated harshly here and there. She argued with herself and made every sort of excuse but the true one. Yet when she answered, the true one came.

Her thoughts moved swiftly and she did not keep the farmer waiting very long.

She shook her head and spoke gently.

"I couldn't do that. I admire you very much. You're the sort of man I do admire. You're strong and safe; and if you're hard, you're just. But I don't love you."

"Perhaps you've never thought upon it?"

"Yes I have. I felt, somehow, long ago that you liked me. I was a good bit flattered to think you could. And so I wondered sometimes. But

I don't feel like that. I hope you'll be my friend still. 'Tis a power of strength to a girl to know she has a strong friend."

He got up.

"You're wrong," he said. "'Tis beyond guessing what things you and me might have done pulling in double harness. But, if you don't love me, there's no more to it. Only remember this: life's harder than the hardest and stronger than the strongest; and two hearts can often bear a load that will break one. Marry that man and you'll be a lonely woman as sure as you're born. You'll bear his burdens and he won't know you're doing it; you'll wear your wits to the bone for him, and he won't thank you for your trouble; you'll plot and plan his life for him and he'll wish to Christ you'd let him go his own way. He can't understand your mind, because his own ban't built to do it. Can a hawk eat corn? He'll want to keep near the ground, and if you try to teach him to fly you'll get worse than your trouble for your pains. Because if, to please you, he tries, he'll hurt himself. You don't love me. So much the worse for me. I must bear that as I can. And you do love him. So much the worse for you. A friend I'll be to you while I'm above ground—if 'tis only for the sake of what you've taught me. I'm sorry to have wasted so much of your time. And now I'll be gone. Good-bye."

He prepared to leave her and she rose and put out her hand.

"Thank you for your friendship. I'll value it far higher than you know. You'll find a better than me before long."

"Never."

He was gone, but not before he had swept aside her sophistries and told her the truth.

Elisabeth felt cold and rose and went down to the lime kilns. Having warmed her hands and gazed aloft at Cosdon, sinking now into the twilight hour, she looked up the valley and saw the roof of Trevail's farm. Then she descended.

Lucky Madders was below and she spoke with him. He was at the furnace mouth of the kiln 'pulling lime.' Masses of the calcined stone were liberated through the floor of the fire, and Lucky threw what was not 'cooked' into one pile and collected the lime in heaps upon another. The place reeked with hot and dusty air in which lime particles hung thickly.

"This here pulling lime be the thirstiest work in nature," he said; "and that's why for I like it, I expect!"

He showed her the purpose of his toil and expatiated on the value of the material.

"'Tis brown lime you see—the very bestest sort for the bricklayer, or the farmer either. White lime be nothing to it and haven't got half the vartue. If I don't know, who should? I've been burning lime for more than half a century. But there's one or two besides me understands. There's master for one, though he wants everything for nothing and often says I'm a wasteful old blid. And Reynold Dunning—he was here a bit ago—he understands too. A very clever man and hates master. He's lusting after this here place and knows a lot about it. He says we waste tons of money working it. 'Better tell Mr. Pike where then,' I said to him in my sly way, well knowing how they feel to each other. 'No,' he answered, 'but perhaps I'll show him where some

day, when I get the quarry over his head.' 'Tis pull devil pull baker between them men, and I and a few more ancient chaps stand and look on very peaceful; for it is all one to us who makes his fortune so long as we get our wages. We all hoped to make our fortunes once; but that dies out, you know. 'Tis just a youthful idea, and life mighty soon cures it. Then we are contented to look for a bit of happiness; and then even that goes; and at last we ask no more than to be allowed to creep about and escape from pain."

He prattled on, and presently, having thanked him for telling her so many interesting things, she left him and returned to Zeal. From that hour the azure of her youth's bright sky was clouded. Gloom encompassed her when she tried to sleep, and she wept. Thought and care were already busy with her brow, to stamp their impress upon it; for she belonged to the children of thought and could not escape her heritage. Her mind tormented her and she tasted the torture that may spring from truest love.

CHAPTER XIII

ALLIED TO superabundant hardiness, energy, and vitality, that seemed to link him with a prehistoric order of beings, Abraham Pike observed a rule of conduct, though that, too, was antiquated. His father had been 'an Old Testament man,' as he was fond of declaring; he had received his name from the mythical common father of the Semitic tribes; and upon the tribal God of the Jews did he build his ferocious morality. In a town he had proved less powerful; among the rural folk his strength was manifest.

In reality Abraham liked his nephew well. From early youth he had known and befriended Charles, and if his attachment to the younger was more the friendship that a man feels to a dog than to a fellow-man, yet the emotion could be called genuine. Certainly it exceeded any entertained by Pike for another. Trevail was grateful to him, faithful to him and useful to him. The amenities of Trevail had even served him at a pinch and succeeded with men impervious to his own methods. Trevail, like the sun, succeeded in making a traveller part with his coat sometimes, when the east wind of his uncle failed to win it. "We hunt in couples," Pike actually said on a gracious occasion. But long ago the elder had perceived the futility of making Charles a man

like himself. He took him now as he was, held him at a certain valuation, and used him when Trevail's peculiar and minor gifts of tact and urbanity seemed better suited to an occasion than his own drastic methods. In his way he was a judge of character, and as Trevail came to man's estate and matured his personality he grew more useful to his uncle.

To Abraham Pike's home, seven days after his disastrous talk with Elisabeth, came Trevail at dawn. It yet wanted some minutes of five o'clock when he appeared, but his uncle was waiting for him, and together in the pure light of morning they set out together to walk to Chagford. The matter in hand concerned the purchase of a house in the adjacent hamlet, and the elder, familiar with the present owner, judged that his nephew might haggle to better purpose with such a man than he could.

They passed by Clannaboro' from which no feather of smoke as yet ascended, and Pike spoke suddenly.

"That man's after a woman!" he broke out.

"What man?" asked Trevail, unaware of the train of thought in his uncle's mind.

"The Clannaboro' man. And I'm hopeful he'll get her. If he had a wife and maybe children—'tis like offering yourself naked to the world. You've got to defend yourself at fifty places; and you've got less power of doing it."

"You mean Miss Densham?"

Trevail's voice faltered.

"Yes, Lizzie at the inn. I see you know."

"I know this: that the man that wins her will be a thousand times stronger for it, not weaker."

Pike scoffed.

"A woman's a woman—clay to man's stone always—meant to be; built to be; invented to be, And they make up their weakness by craft, as the way of the female creature is. The first man was just like you—else the history of the world would be different. If he'd been like me—well, I might have disobeyed my Maker and ate of the tree; but I'd have took damn good care my female didn't."

"Dunning's like you, but not in that. He wouldn't have thought of her, or looked at her, if he hadn't known she was one in ten thousand. And I tell you this, Uncle Abraham, if you'd met such a woman as Lizzie when you were thirty years younger, you'd have wanted her—for her strength."

The other considered.

"If I'd wanted her, I'd have got her. And you—you're after her, too. He'll beat you easy enough."

Trevail flushed and his lips tightened.

"Will he? How d'you know? You talk as if we were two men fighting for a granite gate-post. Lizzie Densham is alive. She's got a mind."

"I saw a man at a beast show once—years ago. He made a gert leopardess do tricks. She curled and coiled and snarled and showed a set of teeth at him like a mantrap. She came as near as she dared. But his whip was in his hand and his eyes were on the creature; and the beast jumped through a hoop of fire for him, and other fool's tricks. But by God! there was no love lost. 'A lesson that,' thought I. 'Tis the way to treat men and women—especially women. Never take the eye off.' I talked to the tamer after and looked at his whip. The handle was lead, the

lash was leather and steel. He could have cut to the bone with it if need be. And the leopardess knewed that."

"Your bark is worse than your bite, uncle."

"Wait till you've felt my bite."

"I'm going to offer for Lizzie. You say that man will beat me. I say he might if she was a stock or a stone. But she cares for me."

"Why? Because you're my nephew."

"Money don't tempt her. She's got strange thoughts. They are grand in a sort of way for a young woman to have. She's very ambitious and always at me to take larger ideas and all that."

Pike was interested.

"Is she? Well, I don't find fault with her there. I've tried to do the same."

"No you haven't. You want me harder: she wants me higher. I love her: that's what matters. And I know that I'd be a cleverer and usefuller man a thousand times over if I had her."

"And what do she think of Dunning?"

"She don't often name him except to quote something he's said. I should reckon she likes his ideas better than she likes him."

The elder reflected silently.

They came to Chagford presently, and at the bridge over Teign, in the valley beneath the village, met Reynold Dunning riding toward them. He stopped his pony in answer to Trevail's nod, but addressed his uncle.

"Good-morning, Pike," he said. "I may save you a journey. Are you come about Nicholas Perrott's house—the one he wants to sell?"

"What's that to you?"

"Nothing now. I've just bought it. One to me—eh? You save a penny too often, my old

bird; and too often lose a shilling by it. If you went about quicker on four legs and didn't trust so much to your own two, you'd win many a market that you miss nowadays!"

He laughed grimly in the other's face and was gone.

Pike stood still upon the bridge. Then he rested at the parapet and crossed his arms and stared at the flowing river beneath.

"All rubbish I dare say," suggested Trevail.

But the other put up his hand for silence.

"Don't you be twittering," he said. "No; that man never talks rubbish. He's got the house and he's given me a lesson in the bargain. The most useful knowledge in the world is what we get from our enemies."

For once he showed no rage before defeat but rather a sullen amusement.

"Didn't know he was good for a house like that," he said—to himself rather than to his nephew.

Then he turned his back on Chagford without more words and began to walk home. In a lane he plucked a handful of dandelion leaves and ate them. For a long time he said nothing; then he spoke to some purpose and surprised Trevail mightily.

"Get that woman away from him!" he said suddenly. "I believe 'tis a rare case where she'd do more good than harm to the man. He's cunning and he's clever, and if he wants her, 'tis not for nonsense but for business. You get her away. Buy the woman a gift. I've got a golden brooch that I'll sell you cheap."

The bar of the Oxenham Arms faced north,

but upon the opposite side of the street stood a double cottage with a white-washed front, and when the sun shone upon it the light was reflected brilliantly across and flashed into Lizzie's workshop. Often it gleamed upon her face and hair, touched the polished brass and pewter, warmed the darkest nooks and crannies of the old tap-room. The debt was repaid at night, for then a great disc of light thrown from the bar windows flamed out against the opposite walls, and often a grand silhouette of Lizzie's head appeared for a moment there as she bent and eclipsed the light.

Trevail saw this spectacle now and his heart quickened. He entered the bar and waited for a little while until a customer was gone. He came early that he might escape the habitual visitors, for he had much to say, and he knew not how difficult it might be to make his peace. Their last parting had been in anger at the quarry—a week earlier. He came to his apology gradually and found the woman in a gentle mood. She smiled and shook hands with him; but he felt a barrier. His sensitive spirit told him that there had come a change over him and he wrongly attributed it to their quarrel.

"'Tis wonderful how that light shines over the way," he said. "'Tis just like a magic lantern, and when your head gets between it and the window you can see a shadow picture of you against the front of Mr. Knapman's house."

She was amused.

"Let me go in the bar a moment and you run out to the door. Then you'll see."

She agreed and saw Trevail's profile upon the white-wash. He did not know it, but the

straight lines of his face thus made gigantic were fine. Lizzie admired the effect.

"'Tis give and take on the sides of the street," she said. "Mrs. Knapman's a very early riser, and often in the winter 'twas the flash of her kitchen fire, touching the ceiling over my bed, that has told me the time had come to get up."

Her lover laughed.

"You're near as bad as my uncle. He makes it his boast that in winter he rises by the light of a morning candle from t'other side of the street. Old White, the woodman, lives there—a bachelor too—and so soon as uncle sees his light glimmering across, he rises up and dons his clothes by it!"

The conversation, thus pleasantly begun, kept cheerfully on until Charles had achieved his purpose.

"I'm cruel sorry once for all about—about that business in the quarry. You were right and I was wrong, and I'm very grieved for they silly things I said."

"'Twasn't all your fault," she answered, but he would not hear that.

"All—all. I hadn't got a leg to stand upon, and who be I, anyway, to dictate where you shall take your walks?"

"We can forgive each other," she said. "People can't always agree."

"If people don't agree with you, they're in the wrong."

She shook her head impatiently.

"Don't say things like that. They make me feel so silly. Few women are oftener wrong than me—worse luck."

"Prove that I'm forgiven then and let me come to the top of the Beacon with you next week.

There for choice, for that's the place you love best in these parts."

"The candleberry's leaves are sweet again."

"Please say you'll come."

Two men entered the bar and hastened her answer.

"Very well, I will. Thursday of next week."

"Bottom of the lane at three o'clock?"

She nodded.

"Thank you with all my heart. 'Tis far, far more than I deserve," he said; and then he was gone.

A moment later Jack Jope came in with Lucky, while others soon followed behind them. Underhill appeared presently wiping his mouth from his supper.

"What's this I hear, souls, that Reynold Dunning have bought Perrott's house at Chagford over Pike's head?" he asked.

"'Tis true enough," declared Jack Jope. The face of this father of a flock was owl-like. He wore a white pointed beard and large, black-rimmed spectacles.

"Yes, 'tis gospel. Dunning went off after dawn and 'twas all done by the time t'other arrived. Of course we know what he thinks of Dunning already. But this will make him rage terrible furious without a doubt."

"I heard there was an adder got in 'Iron' Pike's house," said Underhill. "He swore he seed it curled up afore the hearth when he comed down yester morning. And it slipped from him like lightning and went in under the wainscot afore he could slay it."

Mr. Knapman looked round.

"We'm all friends here I believe. Let's hope

the man will put his foot on it one fine night getting into bed, my dears!"

Lucky laughed.

"Pike! Do 'e think one long-cripple¹ could hurt him? Why, 'twould take the poison of fifty of 'em to make him mind. He'd set no more score on a single serpent than I would on the nip of a flea. I've seen him take a honeycomb from his bee-butts and care no more about the stinging of the varmints than a bear."

A sudden silence fell, for Pike himself arrived to take his evening potion.

¹ *Long-cripple*—a viper.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN THE TIME for her tryst arrived, Lizzie set forth on a grey day with gladness and frank joy. Because more than a climb to the Beacon's crown awaited her and she knew it.

She met Trevail at the foot of the lane that ran upward to the Beacon, and having climbed it, they took a southern path and came gradually to the summit. They talked but little at first; then he put a question.

"'Tis getting on for a year since you came here, Lizzie. And what d'you think of it? D'you like country life or do you reckon you're about tired of it?"

"No," she said. "I'm happier every way than I was. In London I seemed to live by fits and starts. Here I live all the time—if you can understand that."

"Yes, I can," he answered. "I hadn't the wit to light on such a thought; but well I know what you mean. I lived like that once—just *felt* I was alive off and on. Life was just eating and working and sleeping—over and over again. But I've lived every moment of my life—since you came here."

She looked up at him and he saw the delicious amber flash of her eyes; then her head fell.

He did not speak again until they were at the

summit—poised on the cairn, like two birds between the sad-coloured earth and sad-coloured sky.

“Few signs of spring up here yet,” he said.

But she would not have it so.

“’Tis here if you look for it. The candleberry’s making leaf. The plovers are building their nests.”

“Will you sit here?” he asked.

In the crater formed at the summit of the hill Trevail had long ago made a seat with stones. They occupied it now and sat together in that granite cup under the grey air hidden from all seeing life. Where the pre-Adamite dead had been laid under the stones of this rifled grave, their hearts came together, and a sort of common consciousness, that scorned words, leapt in them naturally and made the man’s labour light.

They had known each other nearly a year; they had learned a great deal about each other. He could not choose but feel that she cared for him. His nature was of the sort that depends on that knowledge and waits for it before offering. In life as in love he had never taken any risks or set fortune on a hazard. He had reached a point with Elisabeth where he knew that his eyes could ask and hers answer. And the answer he felt inevitable, even as she felt his coming question was. Perhaps love seldom declares itself after this jog-trot fashion, since the heart of man is not built often to receive any grand passion so equitably. But Trevail was designed upon that modest pattern. His love, while a reality, had not sufficed to lift him into any chaos of spirit. He had been uncomfortable, hungry, troubled, sorry for himself; but his native soul found it

possible and indeed incumbent to endure and learn the truth by other channels than asking.

He came to the matter placidly. He put out his hand and took hers. Then he told her to look at him.

"Oh, Lizzie, you lovely darling, I know what you are to me. But what am I to you?" he asked.

"You know that too," she answered.

His arms were round her; but his caress was tame to hers. She began to teach him from the moment that they touched. As Venus throws herself upon Mars in the opening thunder of the Lucretian epic, so she now gloriously embraced him. She flung herself into his arms. She wrapped him in her own. She pressed her hot face and her whole body with passion upon him. Nor did her unexpected ardour find him lacking. He hid his amazement at such a revelation and responded like a strong man. His frame mastered hers and she felt it and shut her eyes and rejoiced. Then she relaxed a little and he tightened his embrace.

He cried to her.

"Cleave hold—cleave hold of me! My God and I thought I'd lived afore!"

They panted into each other's faces and their calenture was primitive, primogenial. Their moments belonged to the early morning of man's days, when love first began to break loose from sense a little, and run to meet spirit and return again cold. The woman had lifted her betrothal far from Cosdon's summit to another world. Where love raged over ashes in a cairn, she had wakened echoes of the fierce, far-off time when Dionysus reigned. To a watching soul the ring

of granite about them faded now, the grey sky lifted and a westering sun shone red-gold through laurel and myrtle. And beneath that sudden springing of a sylvan dell, there flashed bright eyes and waved wild tresses; there rose whispered laughter of goat-footed things and whirled a dance of brown thighs and white, where flying faun and nymph ringed round the lovers to the throb of Pan's own passionate syrinx.

Light had grown dim and evening fallen upon that uplifted earth when, like children hand-in-hand, they came down to the valley again.

CHAPTER XV

AT THE EAST END of the long street of Zeal, where it climbs from the valley crookedly, stood a small thatched cottage. The roof was ragged, and the garden, unlike well-kept patches round about, showed nothing but a crop of weeds and willow herb; while from behind them, the cot scowled, like a naughty and dirty child in company of good, clean ones.

Lucky Madders dwelt here with an aged, widowed sister. They were indifferent to appearances, and when Mr. Madders fell ill his doctor protested loudly at the state of the cottage and advised that the old man should be removed. But Lucky refused to go, for he had a mighty dread of hospital.

Now he was recovered from bronchitis, and his sister went round begging for eggs and other luxuries to forward convalescence.

There came to the invalid a visitor, and Elisabeth Trevail, wife of the master of North Combe Farm, appeared with a little basket.

This was her first visit to Zeal since her marriage a month before, and she returned rather shyly.

Mrs. Susan Bolt, Lucky's sister, was in the village, and, at the old man's entreaty, Lizzie sat down to talk for a few minutes. Mr. Madders was full of his own symptoms, and having detailed

them he asked the other how she liked being married.

"I never entered the state myself," he said; "but 'tis one of they things you can argue for and against."

"I'm as happy as the days are long," she declared. "'Tis a wonderful and beautiful thing to be married to the right man, Lucky."

"You seem to have done it, and nobody better pleased than me. I only wish 'twas so vitty down to the Arms."

"'Twas cruel bad luck—the little one——"

"Born dead—yes. Mrs. Underhill is one of they never-stand-still women. Like Martha in the Bible. If thicky Martha had found a husband—which she did not do, the men having no use for her—'tis any odds but she'd have failed him. They energetic, tireless towsters ban't meant for childer. Tom was a good deal put about by it. He isn't home so much as he might be."

"Don't say that."

"Why not? You know all about it. You wasn't there for a year for nothing. My sister came upon Tom and that saucy girl, Emma Jope, shoemaker's daughter, up in Whiddon Down a bit ago. Susan was walking back from Sandy Park, and she surprised 'em a good bit closer together than any married man should be to another female than his own. I say these things to you, because you're one of the married ones yourself now. Of course you won't let it go no further."

"I hope your sister didn't."

"Oh dear no. She had hell for thirty-eight years along with the late Felix Bolt. He ran

away with her in her teens—him being undergardener where she worked as cook-maid. 'A Bolt from the blue' we used to call him. By God, he was a bad 'un! So she understands a lot about life in general, and she wouldn't breathe a word to hurt Tom or his missis no more than I would."

"I hope they'll be happier as time passes," said Mrs. Trevail.

"You brides be framed for hopefulness," he said. "And a good thing too. If you ban't hopeful now, when should you be? But the long and the short with Tom is that he married the wrong one. They Burgoynes be the pushing, masterful sort that make history and get in the papers in a creditable way. They win to testimonials and serve on parish councils and catch the eye and thrive. And she's the same. He wanted a let-well-alone woman, as could make time for cuddling and comfort. However 'tis all one. The people go their own way and life pans out according to the liver."

"I'm going to Oxenham Arms now—to see them all. Charlie's away in Exeter, and Mrs. Underhill has asked me to have dinner with them."

"The new barmaid is a failure I'm told. Neddy Knapman was in yesterday to smoke a pipe and give me the news. And a very nice young rabbit he brought with him. The kindness you find in people as you'd think didn't know the word! 'Twas almost worth while having the tubes go wrong to see the human nature in this place."

"We're all very fond of you, Lucky."

"And well I know it. But the new girl won't

do I'm told. She comes from Plymouth and be a cat-handed thing—moves to the crash of broken glass by all accounts."

"Well, I must be gone. I'm very glad you're better."

"How's my master? He was in here raging a bit ago. Said I ought to be shamed of myself to lie abed and me no more than threescore and ten. But all things have their uses. My being laid by have showed him that he can't get a lime-burner like me off any hedge."

"Uncle knows that very well now. He has missed you a great deal. My husband says you ought to have a bit on to your wages when you go back."

"Does he? 'Tis a very proper idea, and I shall advance it and I hope you will, if you've got any power with Mr. Pike."

"I haven't. Who has? We are civil to each other and that's all we ever shall be."

"'Tis a harsh vartue in the man that you can never go in doubt of his meaning."

"Never for an instant. But you want to be very brave to be quite clear with your fellow-creatures always."

"That's true," he admitted.

"Just according to your nature. That's the beauty of being married to something different from yourself, Lucky. You learn so much. 'A soft answer turneth away wrath' for instance. Charlie has shown me that."

She was still in the halcyon hour of wedded life. She loved and she saw her husband through rose colour.

"A soft answer may turn away wrath," answered the old man, "but it often don't turn

away trouble; it often leaves him who speaks it sick with himself after."

"I understand that," she answered. "I'm built to understand that—none better. But I'm going to find the middle way now I'm married."

She left him, walked out of his desolate garden and started down the hill to Zeal. Then another more familiar face than Lucky's confronted her; she passed a horseman and looked up and saw Reynold Dunning.

He was riding to Oxenham House, where it stood in its secluded groves some distance above the valley beyond North Combe; but he reined up at sight of Lizzie, hid the throb at his heart and dismounted.

She smiled and offered her hand. He held it and shook it strongly.

"Well met!" he said.

They had not spoken together since her marriage, but they were friends still, for after her betrothal he had reminded her of her promise to count him a friend always. His nature was such that the relation was possible to him; moreover in his mind the acquaintance embraced remote future chances. He had suffered at her refusal, but when he heard that she was to marry Trevail he told himself he had not done with her. Her friendship for the present was all that he could hope for; but he looked on starkly through a space of five years.

They spoke a little on general subjects, and she asked him where he was going.

"No matter," he answered. "You can't have my secrets no more. You're on the side of the enemy now."

"The enemy!"

"Be the word too strong? Of course your interests are with Charlie, and his are with Pike; but you very well know that with Pike and me 'tis 'which he should' all the time."

"I haven't thought of these things."

"But you will. You're built to take life too serious. 'Tis the will-power and the hunger to have things different from what they are. You've got it; I've got it. We'd have pulled together and pulled down Cosdon Beacon between us if we'd wanted to. But see will-power on one side, linked to weakness on the other. Look at the Oxenham Arms."

"I'm going there now to see Mrs. Underhill. It will come right, I hope."

"Hopes never sowed a seed or gleaned a ear. It can't come right. Be Nature going to change to suit a publican and his wife?"

"Whose fault is it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You've lost your old quick wits, Lizzie Trevail. You 'hope' and you ask 'whose fault?' Why do you say 'whose fault?' Fault's not the word, unless 'tis the man's fault for being Tom Underhill and the woman's for being Minnie Burgoyne. She took Tom, because she saw a bit of stuff that she could soak with Burgoyne ideas and thought to make Burgoyne all through. And he took her because he loved her—just that reason and no other."

"They'll learn to give and take."

"You watch how it's going to go; and then you'll see a picture of——"

He kept the rest of his thoughts to himself and prepared to depart.

"I won't talk of enemies no more," he said.

"Maybe 'twill be your lot to bring us all into friendship—eh? And never trouble yourself to ask 'whose fault?' when things happen. We don't say 'whose fault?' when the bullock's hoof goes into the lark's nest; we don't say 'whose fault?' when a spring frost ruins the apple harvest; I didn't say 'whose fault?' when you took Charlie instead of me. If you want to ax yourself a question, let it be a different one."

He nodded and rode off, and she stood a moment and felt the old tonic emotion at sound of him. She associated Dunning with the Beacon now. He seemed to have won his soul from that fastness. Since she had refused him, a gentler spirit had animated him, and this had much impressed her.

She sat presently at dinner with the Underhills, and was happy to see apparent amity between them.

The new barmaid and her idiosyncrasies formed the theme of conversation. Tom said little, but appeared to be easy in his mind and cheerful. Mrs. Underhill had recovered from the bitter disappointment of her child. There was no restraint or coldness. They discussed Elisabeth's hopes and ambitions and promised to drink tea with her at North Combe on a coming Sunday. As Dunning and Lucky had been, they were interested to learn how she prospered with her uncle.

From Mrs. Underhill the visitor, of course, heard nothing of a private nature. The publican's wife was notorious for reticence, and none at the Oxenham Arms had ever won her confidence. She was proud, and hid her private griefs and fears from all eyes. Not her mother or father knew from her of the darkness that haunted her life, or the disappointments hidden in it. She kept a bold face for the world; did the thing at

hand; hoped still that with time her husband would acknowledge more generously her powers and virtues. She knew that he was not a happy man, but could not see any way possible to her by which his happiness might be increased. Work was her panacea and filled her life; but work by no means satisfied Tom's requirements and she made the mistake of supposing her own standards the only right ones. She strove with him to have a higher conceit of his position and consider what he owed himself. When this failed, she reminded him of all that he owed her; then he challenged her to show him in what his defection consisted. She endeavoured to do so, and hurt him in one mood and angered him in another. They had many secret quarrels and as many reconciliations. She had not the synthetical mind to group and measure the relative value of things and their bearing upon each other. She would not yield in minor particulars, that the major issues might the more readily be decided in her favour. Minnie's simple rule was to have her way in everything that nearly or distantly concerned her.

She admitted no confidantes to share her uneasiness; but her husband could not keep his secrets and took them to sympathetic ears. Sometimes he hated himself for disloyalty, but, after he had been married a year, that emotion wore off; he entered upon a sullen phase and convinced himself that he was misunderstood and wronged. He found no difficulty in meeting with men and women of the same opinion. His own sex would often loaf at the inn and listen and express commiseration for the sake of the free drinks that flowed out while Tom talked; and a woman there

was who honestly did feel for the publican and did not hesitate to console his bruised spirit whenever he sought her. Perhaps she hardly knew what might come of the friendship at first; but it seemed that a time was near when little Emma Jope would have to solve some problems on her own account, for presently both she and Mr. Underhill found that he could not well do without her.

When Elisabeth left the inn she saw the girl of her thoughts. A great scarlet tank drawn by two black horses stood before the dwelling of shoemaker Jope. 'Royal Daylight Oil' was printed in black letters on the receptacle, and behind it, chaffing the driver, appeared Emma with a can in her hand.

She saw Lizzie, set down the can, ran across the road to her and shook hands.

"What a stranger! And how do you like being Mrs. Trevail? You'm blooming I'm sure!"

The girl was bright and happy. The elder noted that her eyes were brown and beautiful, her mouth small but sweetly turned. She had a comely figure and pretty hair.

"And how's your sister getting on—Nellie, I mean?"

"She likes being married so well as you do. Ned Startup's doing well."

Elisabeth risked a remark to see what the girl would answer.

"'Twill be your turn soon—such a maiden for the boys as you."

But Emma tossed her head.

"Boys! I haven't got no use for boys. If I marry, 'twill be a man and a rich one. But I shall be an old maid I expect."

They talked a little while longer, and Emma made no allusion to the Underhills. Her father had found a widow and proposed to marry again shortly.

“’Tis Mrs. Cottle from Tawton. She says father always puts her in mind of Moses in her family Bible. I don’t stop home an hour after she comes. Everybody knows she’s a drinker.”

“What’ll you do then?”

“Look round,” declared Emma.

CHAPTER XVI

NORTH COMBE FARM was happily planted in the hollow of the land beneath Tawton. It stood half a mile beyond Pike's quarry, and the blue-stone face of the dwelling-house contrasted pleasantly with the grey and mossy thatches that covered it. The building faced south, and from her bed Lizzie's wakening eyes could see Cosdon rising into the morning sky.

The place was prosperous but too small every way for Mrs. Trevail's ambitions. She did not think that North Combe offered a theatre large enough for her husband's energies. At present, however, Charles had but little money saved; his uncle exacted an adequate rent for the farm; indeed, as her knowledge extended and she began to understand the value of arable land, Lizzie judged that her husband paid too much. Others confirmed the opinion and she felt at this point must the inevitable labour for Charlie begin. In many other directions it seemed that his life cried to her dumbly for help; but she was clever; not for nothing had she seen the wedded life of the Underhills bud and blossom. The trouble there appeared in too ready and inexorable self-assertion. She saw very plainly indeed where Minnie Underhill was ruining the happiness of her home; and she was full of resolutions to avoid a

like catastrophe. In contrasting the two cases she found points of great difference between them. These need not be detailed, since they existed largely in Elisabeth's own opinion and the disparity was not so great as naturally she imagined. But on one article of difference she chose most to dwell and told herself very stoutly that in the matter of a great, abundant and perfect love her case was quite unique. Honestly she believed that the Underhills could never have known the full splendour of the passion as it existed between her and her husband. Such love, she felt very confident, must survive all stress.

She had been married nearly eight months and not a cloud was above the horizon; but her native spirit, having now mastered the situation in all its bearings, began at last to cry out. The honeymoon should end, she told her heart; it was time that she became more to Trevail. She found him a man to love through and through; she believed that his nature only wanted her sympathetic understanding and intuition to rise far higher.

Mr. Pike and she were never friends from the first. He soon perceived a fundamental opposition of principle and wished her away again. He held her presence calculated to unsettle and spoil his nephew's usefulness, from his point of view; while she believed that the old man alone bulked as the great stumbling-block in the life of her husband.

Everything centred on this; every mistaken sentiment and ambition in the life of Charles hinged upon his uncle; every higher thought and purer hope was uttered beyond and without the radius of 'Iron' Pike's influence. So she believed. The elder acted as a permanent eclipse

on Trevail's perceptions, dwarfed his ambitions, sullied his aspirations, made him think meanly; but Elisabeth fancied that when her husband thought and acted for himself, without reference to Pike, he proceeded on nobler lines and showed more of the truth of his character.

To wrest him from this earthy influence was the mighty task she hopefully considered. And Abraham guessed what she desired to do and watched her closely. It amused him to think of a woman coming between him and the only creature on earth for whom he cared. He knew her husband better than Lizzie knew him; he understood the intrinsic characteristics of Charles and did not for an instant imagine that any influence was going to alter his nephew's outlook, or shake his own dominion over him.

Sometimes, to please Trevail, the young wife would abandon her favourite Sunday pilgrimage and, instead, pass pleasant hours with him in those valley regions he liked better. At such hours Lizzie turned her back on the Beacon and dawdled beside Taw, where the river after its long and swift descent from the Moor runs sleek and lazy through the valley reaches. The flat lands spoiled this stream, so thought Elisabeth. All the sparkle and glitter were gone from it; all the fire and energy were dead; its merry mountain song had departed; it murmured drowsily and lagged in weedy back-waters—a stream demoralised.

Taw Green was a favourite haunt of the farmer's. Here the river meandered, purring and peaceful, among flat meadows and beneath many trees. It came at length to a bridge of one span. A little gravel beach spread to the

brink under it; alders thronged the bank and trailed their lower branches in the water; and the stream, taking a sudden turn and running deeply in a channel, widened again, spread out her shining tresses over a comb of stones and then stole silently away into the green shadows of great oaks.

To-day the sun shone brightly upon the stream after noon; a trout rose under the bridge, where was darkness that fell like a velvet pall across the water between two expanses of sparkling light. Overhead trembled reflected illumination from the river. It flashed up under the bridge and found little stalactites that made pearly pendants about the keystone of the arch.

Here came Charles and Elisabeth. Then they moved to a more secluded place and sat together in a dingle beside the stream. The woman long remembered that spot and found every tree trunk and river growth unconsciously impressed upon her mind; because it was the theatre of her first effort to help her husband, the scene in which she began to play her part. Until the present she had been passive and content; now it seemed to her that her own self must rise and be up and doing.

"Life's lovely," she said to him as he lit his pipe and yawned; "but it's not all love, Charlie."

"Let's think it is anyway. I can't see why you should fancy otherwise. If life isn't all love love's the best thing in life, and I want nought better."

"There's nothing better; but there's other things that matter too."

"Leave that to me. I'm pretty wide-awake—eh? You needn't fear. Everything that is mine

is yours. You just go on loving, Lizzie, and leave the rest to me."

"You mustn't divide the work like that," she said. "You wouldn't have me a miserable woman twiddling my thumbs all day and never doing my share. Deeds show love more than words."

"I love words and deeds both," he told her. "I love your speeches better than anything; and your arms round my neck; and your lovely body pressed tight against me. Shine at that—I don't want you to shine at anything else. Damn the work. Let men work. I hate work and always shall, and I hate to see you work. I look to a time when we'll knock off all that—both of us."

"Whatever are you saying, you silly boy! Don't you know how I love work—a regular glutton for it. That's the only thing I like about Uncle Abraham, and that's the only thing he hates about you."

"Well, let him work if he's so fond of it. Our first bit of work is to keep his right side. And now we're on it, Lizzie, I do wish you could give a bit more there. You have more in common with him really than I have. Because he does like a worker, and he respects you for the way you face things and get through what's to do; but somehow I feel you pull against him a good bit."

Her husband was carrying the war right into Lizzie's own camp—a thing she had not expected.

"I hate his meanness. So do you."

"Why call it that? Why not say he's more than common thrifty? You must admire his self-denial and stern mode of life. If I was like

that, I believe you'd think twice as much of me as you do."

She took his hand and squeezed it between her own and kissed it.

"You know I couldn't think twice as much of you. It's only love that makes me want to help you to have a better time. I wouldn't have you different—only happier and always happier. Oh. Charlie, what you've taught me! But love can't stand still. It's got to burn brighter and brighter, or else dimmer and dimmer. Somehow I feel that. And we——"

"Go on about us and leave out everything else in the world. I'm never tired of hearing you tell about me. Come here—nearer. Good Lord, Lizzie, I could sit with my arm round you for ever!"

She came to him and he fondled her and she forgot all about everything but her passion for him. They were lovers still and lived for each other.

Presently she tried to be serious again and said a bold thing.

"I hate North Combe—what d'you think of that now?"

"I think 'tis the first wicked fib you've told me since we were married."

"I hate it, because it's too small, Charlie—far too small for a man like you. I mean that. I want you to have a bigger farm and bigger views and bigger everything."

"You greedy rascal! My views not big enough—eh? My views about loving you not big enough? I'm a bad husband in fact—a sour, curmudgeonly old devil that keeps his poor little ill-used wife——"

Her arms were round his neck again and she stopped him with kisses.

"Be serious," she said, "and let me begin at the beginning."

"I won't be serious. I didn't marry you to be serious. The serious part was courting. Thank God that's over. What torments you did give me! But now I've got you for ever and ever—serious? No, not likely."

"I mean it—a bigger farm—worthy of you and your cleverness. And then you'll get bigger views."

"All in good time. The first thing is a bigger purse. We mustn't quarrel with our bread and butter, Lizzie. If I left North Combe, 'twould be 'good-bye' to Uncle Abraham. And I ban't hungry for more. I want to provide against less. Good luck never lasts for ever. But don't you pull a long face—don't you pout—all in good time. You shall have a coach and four horses, and rings on your fingers and bells on your toes yet, if I'm anybody."

The glamour of the possession of a man was still upon her. She made no further effort then. But she was unhappy in secret. She could not understand herself. Trevail had never thrown dust in her eyes before they were married: only her love for him had blinded her then; but now—now that they were one—it seemed as though a little of his weakness was stealing into her. She felt it—she felt his power to silence her with laughter, and his masculine scorn of her seriousness. This was not good to her and she began to be ashamed of herself and her supinity. She felt that not for this she had wedded Charles Trevail. She told him as they walked onward

together presently that love was precious, but a thing to be kept in bounds and harnessed to high issues.

"We've got souls as well as bodies, Charlie," she said. "I'm not going to have you sing small all your life, I promise you. If happiness is to make us cowards, then let's taste a bit of trouble."

"You brave bit of loveliness! Isn't that just what I'm telling you? Don't you know we must taste trouble sooner or later? That's a dish nobody may refuse, for if we don't dip in it with the best grace we can, Providence crams us—like we cram poultry. Ha—ha—ha—we'll be miserable all right presently! But to think my clever Lizzie wants to taste before her turn! Happiness won't make cowards of us—we're not the cowardly sort. Let's be happy all we can and every moment we can—that's what I say. Why, good God—I hate sleeping all night when I wake up and see what's in my bed beside me! Sleep—'tis to miss hearing you breathe—'tis so much precious time wasted from happiness—'tis just to be dead when I might be alive."

"You're in your schoolboy humour to-day, and so a sensible woman is wasted on you. But I'll get you on the Beacon next Sunday—up in the cairn. Then 'twill be my turn and you'll have to listen to reason."

"Listen—yes—to your blackbird's voice. Be I ever tired of it?"

"I hope you never will be."

"'Tis the only music that I ever want to hear," he said.

Her heart warmed to him. The road was empty, and she put up her face to be kissed.

Yet she felt the failure. It braced her—

perhaps more than a semblance of success might have done. This laughing attitude—this muffling of every real thing with kisses—irked her. Even as the caress that she had herself invited fell now upon her lips, the woman's smothered spirit struggled to get free. She knew the truth and felt the change; but for that day she did no more. His love and worship were unutterably precious to her and she believed that life would be worthless if they vanished from it. Therefore she retired within her own soul after that hour and for the time being gave him the victory. She noted, however, how he took it—in a large, indifferent, good-humoured spirit. He accepted her silence on the unpleasant theme, not as a triumph for him, but as a thing inevitable between them. He had won by laughing and kissing. There had been no need to put out his powers. But did he possess powers? She knew that laughing and kissing do not conquer the world. She had heard indeed that love can. But then what was the whole truth about love? There was so much to learn still, and the time had come for learning.

Now they could see Cosdon's mighty mound rising above the river valley and the woodlands that girdled it. The Beacon had entered upon one of its moments of colour. At the crown of the hill light shone, and where its southern shoulder fell, smoke of fire spread in a transparent blue veil and ascended rosily in the glow that came over the edge of the hill.

"How beautiful it looks to-night," she said.

"Not so beautiful as a cup of tea will," he answered. "And, as for your old hill, I grant it looks fine seen afar off; and the further off the

better. That place would be the ruin of you if I hadn't come between. I won't have you fly no further than my arms, Lizzie. The nest be the place for the mated bird, and my arms be your nest, you darling dear."

"I know it, Charlie, I know it," she told him.

CHAPTER XVII

A FORTNIGHT LATER Trevail's wife was dawdling in the quarry alone. Her husband refused to go out after Sunday dinner and declared that he had eaten too much and must sleep. She left him and started for the Beacon; then accident modified her purpose.

There were a dozen little children playing in the quarry and Elisabeth joined them and warned them of danger in the steep places.

"Come over here," she said. "If you were to slip, you'd break your necks. There's plenty of blackberries this side."

They followed her and she was directing them when loud voices fell upon her ear and, looking upward, she saw two men in the larches that plumed the quarry crest. One she recognised as the lord of the manor and owner of the quarry; the other was Abraham Pike. He spoke in anger; but the younger man laughed. They separated presently and Lizzie's uncle descended into the quarry, while the owner went over the hill to Oxenham House.

Pike, who was in his workaday clothes, had seen the woman and children below and now advanced upon them. Lizzie quickly perceived that he was in a rage and prepared to withstand him.

"I was telling these little ones to keep away from the dangerous places," she said as he arrived.

"Was you? Then you'd better have told them to keep away altogether. I'm not going to have the young devils here stealing my blackberries. Money's dirt to you no doubt, because you're a fool—Begone! and if I see you here again, I'll wring your necks!"

This last threat was addressed to the children. A few of them, who had already met with Mr. Pike to their detriment, were fled already; but half a dozen little girls and an infant remained with Lizzie.

Now one screamed at the terrifying aspect of the foe, and all hastened away with fear on their small faces. The incident served to tune the woman to a passage-of-arms she had long expected. She was not in a good humour and now accosted her uncle in a manner that astonished him.

"You coward!" she said. "Isn't it enough always to be brow-beating and frightening men and women? Must you bully the babies too? Because yonder man wasn't afeared of you but laughed at your anger, you must come to vent it on me. Can't a child pick a handful of blackberries without making you behave like a wild animal?"

"That's your sort, is it? I thought it was! I've known we should clash and knock up a few sparks sooner or late. Now list to me. If you talk like that again I'll turn you out of North Combe neck and crop. And more: you're my nephew's wife now and I expect from you what I expect from him, and I will have it. If you think to speak to me as you used to speak to the

people behind the public-house bar, you make a very big mistake. You've thrown in your lot with Charles Trevail, and you don't know what that means yet. But I'll show you."

"I married him—not you. If I can get him to see you as you are, I shall do. I'm trying all the time to make him a man."

"Shut your mouth! D'you think I'm going to argue with you more than I argue with him? My will's law, and if you shirk it, down you'll go. Take that man from me and the workhouse is all you'll find to cover his soft head. You've got woman's wits anyway. There's cunning in you, else you'd never have took up with him. D'you think I don't see through you? And now I order you to do your share of my work. I didn't let him marry you for nothing. You've got to suit your neck to the collar, my fine, flashing-eyed creature; you've got to do your share for me—such work as a woman can do. Blackberries are plenty this year, and next time you load your market cart for Okehampton, see that four good quarts of my berries go too. My berries—do 'e hear? I look for three shilling and not less. And what's over you may put in your pocket. So now then!"

Elisabeth was frankly amused to think that the great collision she had so long anticipated should come about over a matter so ridiculous. Mr. Pike's mountains of rage often produced such mice as this. He lacked all sense of proportion and could be as wroth about nothing as the most vital issue.

"You mean you want me—*me*—to come out here caddling about and wasting my time to pick blackberries for you?"

"I mean that," he answered. "And I intend it. You're giving yourself too many airs and forgetting the dirt you sprang from. If you intend to be a good wife to Charles Trevail, you'll have to be a good niece to me. Your fate is in my hand and your husband's fate is in yours. At this rate he'll damned soon have to make a choice between you and me; and if I know him he won't hesitate. So you pick my blackberries as a start and find your proper place afore we go any further."

"You'd better learn a bit about me now," she answered quietly. "You've poured out your rude insults for five minutes and seem to think I'm only on the level of dogs to be ordered about by you. You tell me I sprang from dirt. You're a liar. And you say you'll have my husband and me away from North Combe if I'm not careful. Well, that's what I want to happen more than anything on God's earth! He's thrown away in a two-penny half-penny place like North Combe, and if you drive him out of it, you'll be doing what I'm trying to do; and if you can't, I will—sooner or late. So we think alike there; and as for your berries, you silly man, you forget yourself and you forget who you're talking to. Gather your berries yourself, if you can't do better with your time."

He stared.

"By God!" he said. "I'd like to strangle you, you bitch!"

"Try and be civil. Men don't strangle women nowadays—not for a quart of blackberries anyway. I'm glad we've had this row. I was feeling wicked to-day and it's done me good. And you came down the hill pretty wicked also. Have as

many quarrels with me as you please. I like them. I know what you feel. I feel the same often and often. You want to make things bend to you; so do I. But you won't make me bend."

"Then you'll be broke," he said. "You'll be scat abroad and cast in pieces, like cracked cloam. Pick them blackberries for me you shall; and, come winter, you shall pluck the sloan off the blackthorns for me and scratch your eyes out doing it for all I care. Slaves—slaves, that's what you and your husband be, and the sooner you know it the better."

"You're behind the times," she answered. "'Tis strange that such a clever, wide-awake man as you, Uncle Pike, shouldn't know where the world has got to. It's left you all behind. Women aren't ordered about nowadays. You men have taught us quite differently. We're what you made us, and you've made us think for ourselves and take our own views and go our own ways. We don't pick blackberries just because we're told to. I can't pick your blackberries for you, but you may gather some for me if you like. You haven't put on your Sunday black yet, so you won't hurt yourself. Pick 'em, and I'll go and get a basket."

"D'you want me to fling you down that quarry?"

"Use your wits, uncle, and don't ask silly questions. I'll tell you what I want; but not now. I can help you a great deal if you'll let me, because I know a great many things that will be useful to you. But we must understand where we are. We both want to help Charlie, I suppose; but we're too far apart as yet to do it.

While you talk nonsense about us being slaves, we can't do any good for you."

"Slaves you are and slaves you shall be and—and—pick them blackberries or you'll feel the weight of my hand!"

"'Tis only tigers and wolves talk like that. Come in and have supper with us to-night. You never have yet, and you'll be welcome."

"Be I the sort to break bread with people?"

"No; but you might learn. You're so narrow-minded. Why, you'd make twice as much money if you spent twice as much. 'Tis all cheese-parings and green stuff out of the hedges, your savings. If you come to me, I'd soon make you take larger views."

He stared savagely, stupidly at her, like an animal cornered.

"Pick them blackberries!" he thundered again, "and if you don't, you shall have hell for your pains."

"'Tis a very silly idea to think you can play a lone hand. Come to me and I'll enlarge your mind a great deal. Why, Charlie could teach you a thousand things you'd do well to learn! Get a bit more modern, else you'll be left all behind—with the foxes and wild things. We want to be friends; we want nothing better than that. Is it likely that I should wish Charlie to quarrel with you unless he's got to do it? But if you mean to treat him as a slave, then 'tis about time we stirred ourselves I'm sure. Be reasonable——"

But he ended the argument then by an appeal to force. He leapt forward and boxed Lizzie's ears with an open palm. He hit hard and sent her staggering from left to right with one blow, then

steadied her with another. Her ears burnt like fire and the outrage left her staggering—panting, blushing with rage.

“Pick them blackberries!” he cried for the last time, “and never more dare to talk to me.”

She sank down dazed on a stone above the quarry and he went off; but if her mind endured storm, it was nothing to the tempest in his. Him she understood. She had only erred in her estimate of his irrationalism; she had only over-estimated his power of self-control before assault. But her sharp, clean-turned words had staggered him and shaken up his estimates of life and his values in general. His rage had risen from a muddy, distracted sense that she was stronger than he, that the thoughts she stabbed into him were true; that he had missed what she possessed. The brute in him arose before this attack. He had lost his temper and now went off like a dog who has bitten a man and bolted. The dog knows dimly that there must come a day of reckoning for this; and Abraham Pike knew it. He had not met such an enemy before—an enemy who offered friendship. His sex instinct was non-existent and no sense of chivalry controlled his actions. He dimly felt, as perhaps a bullock feels when butting a heifer, that you must not strike a woman as hard as a man—that in the one case an open palm may be used, where a fist is the natural weapon in the other; but beyond that he had scarcely reached. A sense of bewilderment crowded down upon him now, that he could have raised his hand at all in a matter of words between himself and a woman. What had she said to provoke him beyond words? He remembered his experience of the lion-tamer,

and what he had learned and practised as a result of it. But now he felt that the positions were reversed. He was the leopard.

As for Elisabeth, with singing ears and a painful headache she sat on until the discomfort lessened; then she turned homeward and found her husband in the best of tempers waiting for his tea. He was in the garden and had just picked her a great pear. She said nothing of what had happened, but waited to do so until her own mind had grown a little clearer upon the subject. She was questioning her past attitude to Pike and asking herself in what she had erred. Actual physical violence from a man to a woman seemed a preposterous notion. She had heard such things of her husband's uncle, but had not dreamed that they could be true. The revelation astounded and bewildered her. She felt little anger at first—no more than one feels with a refractory child. What to do next was the problem in her thoughts. Life, she told herself, was now about to become an earnest thing. She must begin to work—to work upon the rich material of her husband's love. What would he do, she wondered, on receiving news of this assault? She did not know, and she told herself that it was absurd that she did not know. There could be no shadow of doubt what a husband's attitude to the event should be. She grew angry gradually; she even found herself annoyed with Trevail—not for anything that he had done, but for what he might do. Then she came to a sweeter mind, and decided to tell him calmly of what had happened, at a later hour, when she was further removed from the event and could consider it with more self-control. He perceived that

there was something on her mind and asked for information; but she put him off. She admitted that an incident had vexed her and promised to speak of it at the end of the day.

They went to church in the evening and sat in a familiar pew. There was a monument opposite them, the only object in the building that held any charm for Elisabeth. The mural tablet told that beneath lay the body of "Will Oxenham, Gent., who was buried Feb. 19, 1731, aged 52, and by will gave five pounds yearly to the poor of the parish of Southtawton for ever."

The finality of this always impressed her and in some subtle fashion produced an impression of pleasure. To-night, however, she was distracted by her own thoughts. She felt helpless. Pike had revived a Neolithic attitude to woman, and her weapons, if equal to coping with the man of her time, were powerless before this primitive spirit. The whole situation was grotesque. It belonged to another time and another people. She believed that at last she had come to the right way of looking upon this extraordinary incident. She now knew more of the man with whom she had to deal. She would not err again. He must be managed differently. He must be treated as a child, humoured, coaxed, dealt with tenderly. The truth only made him lose his temper. And that was a thing of all others to be avoided. Her main task seemed to shift its centre from Charles Trevail to his uncle.

That night, when they were gone to bed, she told her husband much that happened in the quarry, but not all. She described her attitude and Pike's anger; but she did not mention that he had struck her.

Trevail listened with deep interest.

"'Twas a very dangerous thing to do," he said. "You really must be careful, Lizzie. You don't know him yet, or you'd not have dared to beard him like that. Whatever were you thinking about?"

"The future," she answered. "I'm not a wooden doll, Charlie; I've dawdled and wasted time here enough. There must be something wrong all round when that man can tell me seriously to go picking blackberries for him."

"'Twas only his rough way of showing you he had the power."

"Was it? Well, I've been angry once to-day and I'm not going to be again; but you must be clear before we go to sleep. Do you want me to pick blackberries for your uncle, or do you think, as your wife, that's not proper work for me?"

"Of course it isn't. You do get so deadly serious over things. I lay 'twas only his joke. You'd riled him and he's not a patient man, so he riled you back and talked that nonsense and pretended he was in earnest."

"He never pretends."

"Then—then I must talk to him—I suppose—I——"

He broke off and showed irritation.

"I wish to God this hadn't happened. 'Tis a thousand pities, so clever as you are, you can't get on the blind side of him. I want for us to go on steady and quiet as we have been. You must try to see how that man looks to me and how I look to him. I owe him everything, and I'm the only friend he's got in the world. And if you are going to cut him up and anger him, then God knows where we'll be this time next year."

"Can't you stand alone?"

"There's such a thing as gratitude. I'll hear no more of this. I'm not going to quarrel with him; and more are you. I'm very sorry he was surly and I wish I'd been there to temper it. I'm only thankful you didn't agg him on to strike you. It wouldn't have surprised me, and if that had happened, knowing you as I do, I can guess that all the fat would have been in the fire with a vengeance."

"We must know each other better even yet, Charlie."

He clasped her close to him and kissed her neck and kept his face against her.

"You blessed thing—yes, better and better and sweeter and sweeter we'll know each other! And don't you think I'm not your side body and soul. What's life to me away from you? What's a million uncles and a million farms to me against you? You'll never know—I swear you never will—all that you are to me. There's nothing else in the world that counts but you—nothing."

She was comforted.

"I'm half yourself, and I'm going to do half the work and have half the trouble and half the blame and half the praise and everything. I didn't handle him right perhaps."

"Don't handle him at all. Keep clear of him. He can be all right when he's in a good humour. We must be worldly wise, Lizzie. Love mustn't blind us to facts. I want to keep close friends with my uncle—if it can be done without losing my self-respect."

"The very thing," she said. "'Tis just your self-respect I'm jealous for—yours and my own. They're the same for that matter."

“We’ll leave it at that, then.”

His voice told her how thankful he felt to drop the subject, and Elisabeth ceased; but she knew that her notion and her husband’s of what constituted self-respect were as yet very dissimilar. She asked herself how far her hand would stretch to meet his—how far he must rise and she descend. Then, from this shadow of concession, she turned passionately and burnt at heart long after he slept. She told herself that she was feeble and weak to let the word ‘concession’ enter the argument. She would try for everything and be content with no paltry reciprocity. For his sole sake she would try.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT FOUR O'CLOCK on a morning in mid-winter a very wonderful and beautiful night picture appeared from the bedroom window of Tom Underhill. Out of the great darkness, without one atom of detail to disturb it, there emerged the dim, white-washed face of the opposite cottages, and such light as never leaves the open air, even at darkest hours, was gathered mysteriously here. The cottage fronts stared out of nothing. Earth and sky were merged into an absolute and impenetrable blank and in the midst the faint plane of white-wash stood ghostly between the upper and lower gloom. But above, as Underhill looked forth, through a rift in the sky, twinkled the North Star, with the Dragon swinging round it. Nothing broke the infinity of space between the grey faces of the cots and the remote suns that appeared above them; for, through mighty passages of absolute darkness, the eye was lifted straight from the crepuscular glimmer of the cottages to the stars. They completed the picture and represented all that was to be seen of the universe at that hour.

Underhill rose and dressed. He no longer occupied the same room as Minnie, and the psychological result of that separation had served to hasten a moral and spiritual divorce.

Now the man was leaving his wife for ever. Their heads would not rest beneath the same roof again. She did not know it, but within two hours she was destined to do so. For her Care waited in shape of a letter from her husband—husband no more.

Underhill rayed himself, then went downstairs. He carried a small portmanteau. He took his driving coat from a peg in the hall of the inn, let himself out and soon harnessed a horse into a high dog-cart. No glimmer of dawn as yet broke night, but a fine rain fell fitfully. He led his horse down the hill and climbed out of Zeal on the eastern side. Already a spark or two of fire in cottage windows told that the folk were rising.

At the summit of the hill he stopped and lighted his lamps. Then, from a gate by the way, there came a woman to him. She was enveloped in a big coat that hid her shape and turned her into one amorphous smudge. She carried a 'hold-all,' and her hands were cased in white wool gloves, which made them visible against the obscure background of her body.

Underhill took her bundle and put it at the back of the dog-cart. Then he caressed her. Their breath steamed in a bright fog together under the ray of the lamp.

"Be it all right, Emma?"

"Quite all right."

"You didn't forget to leave a letter for your father?"

"No."

He helped her into the trap, then mounted himself. He wrapped a rug round her and she snuggled close to him.

They started at a trot on the journey to Exeter.

Dawn broke tardily and the grey was faintly laced with streaks of silver above the eastern hills. They had not spoken as yet. Then the man broke silence.

"We've done it, Em," he said.

For answer she lifted up her face and kissed his cheek.

He looked at his watch.

"Minnie's reading my letter this minute."

"And father's waking and wondering why the mischief he don't hear anybody about down house."

"I'm going to do all that mortal man can do for her."

"Trust you for that. She's that sensible—Mrs. Underhill."

"I shall always respect her something tremendous, Em."

"Yes, Tom."

"What d'you reckon that she'll do about it?"

"She'll pack up her boxes and go back to her people."

"She'll find a better man presently—eh?"

"No, she won't. She'll find a different man, that's all."

"I know the very pattern of man for her," declared the run-away husband. "But all the same I'm very doubtful if she'll take another. She'll divorce me, and after that I don't know what she'll do."

"Now let's talk about us," said Emma Jope. But he was too tender-hearted to be in a holiday mood. The sun rolled over the edge of the horizon presently and the dripping hedgerows flamed with countless gems. Ahead the road glittered and the harness of the horse flashed.

"Don't you fret for her. 'Twill be no very cruel surprise. She's understood these many days how it was with you. None's to blame. She'll make no scene."

"I've offered her half of all I've got in the world, Emma, and if she was to refuse it, I'd still hold it hers and put it by for her."

"She may refuse it, however."

"I hope not."

Light flooded the earth and life was afoot again.

"You'll be wanting your breakfast," he said.

She shook her head; then she burst out, "Oh, Tom, I will try so hard to make you happy!"

"Don't I know it? Don't I understand how 'tis between us? You're all right. We'll leave it now. I've got you for my own, you dear little mite—that's all that matters to me."

"I'd go through fire and water for you, Tom."

"Don't begin that stuff. I don't want no more of that!" he answered. "So would she—she's said that very same word. Let's have no more fire and water talk. I want comfort and peace, and to be let go my own humble way. I want to wear what I like and eat what I like and mess along just as I please. And if you be content to take me as I am and feel satisfied, then I shall be a happy man and you'll be a happy woman. But if you think to alter me and worry about what I owe to myself and all that blasted nonsense——"

"I know—I know."

"You're young for me; but you'll make me ten years younger myself in six months and I'll make you a bit older; so 'twill work very well, please God."

"I always liked you, from the time you come

in the shop and chucked me under the chin and kissed me, and thought I was a child. And your good's mine now; and if you don't care to wear new clothes I shan't want to see you in 'em; and if you call me I'll come to you, Tom, and your right will be my right and your wrong will be my wrong. And I don't care no more about what any other person on God's earth thinks of me than I care what they sheep think of me."

"I believe every word you say. We've knowed each other pretty close this longful time; and you understand the sort of man I am. And if I don't suit you neither, then I shall reckon there's a screw loose in me, and string myself up."

"You'll have to behave mighty queer not to suit me," she said. "Who be I to fall foul of a man who's chose me—a little go-by-the-ground creature you could put in your pocket? 'Tis a very wonderful thing you ever lowered your eyes to look in mine; and if I can't pay you back with life-long service, I ban't worthy to lace your boots."

"I don't ask for nothing impossible—just to be let alone to work out my own life my own way."

They said no more and, at the village of Cheriton Bishop, Underhill decided they would take breakfast.

"Be you known here?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, "I be—very well known indeed. The master here is a bachelor with a great fondness for minding his own business."

Her first instinct was to oppose his idea. But she did not.

"'Tis your will and I'm as hungry as you," she answered. He alighted and helped her down.

Then a boy took the horse and they went in together.

Elsewhere Mrs. Underhill had risen and found her husband's letter waiting for her. There was a looking-glass in their little sitting-room, and Tom had thrust his missive into the rim, where she could not fail to mark it.

Minnie read and stood there alone with her life in ruins round her. For this she had toiled; for this she had fretted her brains by day and night; for this she had risen early and late taken rest. Yet this news found the woman not very greatly astonished. Rumours had reached her through her own people. The Burgoynes were proud, and Tom's indifference and lack of self-respect had fretted Minnie's parents as well as herself. She had felt suspicious at his very assiduity; she had guessed that a recent access of amenity and tenderness might have its roots in other soil than her heart. Now he wrote plainly, hid nothing, declared that he was going to live with Emma Jope, who understood him and his nature, and offered Minnie half his money. He wished to be reasonable and just, but he felt that their lives lived together were both being wrecked and he hoped that she would see the futility of a continuance. "You think meanly of me," he wrote, "and no doubt from your point of view I am pretty well everything I oughtn't to be. But that's not pleasant to know. And if a person makes you stink in your own nostrils, then that's not the person you ought to live with. You are too lofty-minded to get any satisfaction from a man like me; and so we must be free to try again. I've got what I want, and I hope you'll divorce me according to

law so quick as you're able, and then you must try again too."

Minnie read all; then she ate her breakfast and saw to the ordering of the day's work. There were two lodgers stopping at the inn and she heard what they needed. She let it be known that her husband had gone to Exeter, but said no more on the subject. Then at leisure she dressed and went home to her parents. Her father was a farmer and owned land two miles from Zeal.

The situation was received with philosophy by Minnie's mother, but Fabian Burgoyne took it in another spirit. The good name and fame of his race was in the mire. Such a catastrophe had never before overtaken the family.

Tom Underhill had left an address in Exeter, and his wife's father now declared an intention of going there to see him; but Minnie and her mother argued against any such course and finally convinced him.

Minnie indeed had decided what to do: she proposed to return home as quickly as possible.

"He and everything to do with him must go," she said. "I'll come back as I went—in all but sorrow and understanding. I've done my best to better the man, and I've failed."

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," declared her mother. "And for my part I'm thankful to God it happened now and not ten years later."

That night the village of Zeal was thrown into profound excitement by the news that Tom Underhill had run away from his wife.

Minnie would have hidden it until she was able to return home; but it could not be hidden, for Jack Jope had found a letter waiting for him also

and learned that his daughter, Emma, had thrown in her lot with the publican. Mr. Jope found it impossible to conceal his news. His white beard and owl-like spectacles were seen up and down the village all that day. He affected concern, but felt none. Towards night, indeed, after not a few potations, the truth slipped in a full bar, and the shoemaker spoke to Neddy Knapman, Lucky Madders, Charles Trevail, and others who were collected at the Oxenham Arms. Mrs. Underhill had not been seen since the morning, and some rumoured that she was actually gone home already.

"You might have blowed me out of my window, like a mote in a beam," said Mr. Jope. "I comed down house at my usual hour to find no fire nor nothing and the childer all abed. Then her letter faced me, like the eye of doom, stuck against a mustard tin on the kitchen mantel. In a word the man's singled her out. He feels 'tis better that him and Mrs. Underhill should go different ways, and he's long seen in my Emma the fashion of female to suit him. And so come presently, of course, she'll marry him. 'Tis a very sudden and shattering thing no doubt."

"Sudden to us—not to them," said Knapman. "Where I go sneaking about after fish or birds, I oft surprise more than game. And I may tell you, now the murder's out, that Tom and your girl have been devilish thick for a longful time."

"So much the better for that, since it had to be," declared Lucky. "We'll hope that inn-keeper have done wisely and that your young darter will prove a useful pattern of woman to him. 'Twill be a cruel pity if they have to go through all this trouble and disgrace for nought."

"There's the disgrace—as you say," admitted

Mr. Jope. "'Tis a shameful thing in a sort of a way for a maiden to mich off with a married man; but we that know the married state and understand the woman must be large-minded. Tom comes to Emma and he says no doubt—well—he tells her what's no news to any thinking creature here: that he's had no luck with his wife. She listens and says she's sorry to hear it. Then—there 'tis. They go from strength to strength. She airs her opinions and tells him what be the perfect married life. And well she knew it, for didn't she see the united home of her parents and grew up in the sight of what marriage should be? Then Tom finds out that, small piece though my Emma is, 'tis with her like the saying, that little parcels hold the biggest treasures. So he offers for her and she—in a word, neighbours, she takes him outside marriage."

"'Tis a pretty big come-down if you ax me," said a miner. "To go for your little thread-paper of a girl against that splendid, tall, round creature, his wife."

"We weary of the flesh," answered Jope. "Flesh is grass. 'Tis the spirit in 'em keeps wedded people close, or thrusts 'em apart. When you'm thirsty you take your pint; but you don't want to live up to the neck in a barrel of beer. Flesh is a passing thing and becomes a habit and no more than that. But between a man and his wife you want understanding souls, and the power to give and take, and the ready twist to see what t'other wants afore he or she knows it. 'Tis advanced learning that I put before you; but I don't speak off book."

"In fact you're mighty glad it's happened apparently," said Trevail.

"Of course he is," said Knapman. "It means free drinks for the man for the rest of his natural life, don't it, Jack?"

"Certainly not. There's a very painful side that I can't hide from myself. My darter's living in sin for the minute. The law of the land makes it necessary for her to do so."

"To sin by law's a very queer word," said Lucky.

"So 'tis then, and you might say that to follow the law is lawful and that to keep in the bounds of the law is to escape sin. But I won't make any pretence of that sort," continued the shoemaker. "Fornication is deadly sin, we all know, outside church or registry office, but the law demands it, being very indifferent to the Church in all its ways."

"What if she don't divorce him?" asked Trevail.

"What if she can't?" added Knapman.

"There must be cruelty," admitted Jack Jope. "Cruelty there must be, for that's the added crux that the law, in its wisdom, puts in the path of the woman against the man. But no doubt her lawyers will find that Tom was cruel. In fact 'twould have been very cruel not to be cruel, if I make myself clear; because she don't want to be handcuffed to him no more after this. For that matter she's young and handsome and won't have to wait long to find another sort of man better suited to her bustling and cleansing nature."

They debated the problem with all its aspects and agreed in this: that Mrs. Underhill would most certainly divorce her husband at the earliest possible opportunity. There was no feeling or

animus in any heart. All appeared to consider that Underhill had shown a very sane spirit in breaking a bond that had become unbearable. And all likewise hoped that his wife would soon find herself suited with a type of husband better able to appreciate her manifold virtues.

Trevail took the news home to Lizzie and they talked over it. She had little to say, but the little that she did utter won a negation from her husband.

"'Tisn't all his fault and you mustn't think it, Lizzie. 'Tis a case where the love wasn't strong enough to stand the strain. If she'd loved him better, she couldn't have been so hard all round. The poor devil found himself with his back against the wall fighting to call himself a man. That couldn't have happened if they'd loved properly."

"'Tis just because she did love him so truly, that she was at such pains to lift him above himself and make him take higher views."

"No," he said, not sorry to say it. "That was self-love in her. She wanted to mould him anew on the Burgoyne pattern and hadn't wit to see that it couldn't be done. And if she'd loved him better, she'd long ago have stopped torturing him. Look at them and then look at us. Such things will never happen to us, Lizzie, even though we don't always see eye to eye; because the love we've got for each other would laugh at such a miserable mess and keep us clear of it for ever."

"I'll believe that with my whole heart," she said.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE DEEP WOODS under Clannaboro', twilight of evening already hastened at three o'clock on a late December day. The sun was sinking behind Cosdon and under the trees the lemon light of it touched dead brake fern to splendour, glittered over the hollies, flashed upon their crimson harvest and found the hazels also, where they straggled, naked save for the little tight catkins awaiting spring. This beauty spread beneath a network of ash-coloured oaks that lifted trunks, mossy and ivy-clad. Here and there leaves still clung to them and made fire through the grey forest; here and there a blue fir lifted its distinctive colour amid the duns and drabs of the hibernal wood. Aloft a fresh wind sighed; a pigeon sometimes clattered away, like a noisy arrow; and small birds flittered with subdued twittering forward from tree to tree. They were long-tailed tits and moved in a little company together. Above all, through sun-touched reticulations of the boughs, there shone out pale December blue, flecked here and there with feathers of cloud touched to rose by the last light of day. At the gate a horse and trap stood tethered, and deep in the recesses of the wood a man and woman walked together. Lizzie Tre-vail and Reynold Dunning moved beside a brook

that flashed through the brown, leaf-covered earth of the woods. He had promised her good store of holly for winter decorations at North Combe and she was come to fetch it. But the berries were forgotten and they spoke of matters more interesting to both.

She was asking the man for advice.

"It's long ago now, but I smart still when I remember it. And yet I never told Charlie. I couldn't dare to think what he'd do."

"Couldn't you?"

"A man's own wife to be struck!"

"Yes—there wasn't much choice for the man of course. But the case is made a bit more difficult than it looks by the nature of things. Pike is old to begin with and unlike other men. Then you must remember how your husband stands to him and what your husband is. Trevail is Trevail, and no man will ever see him being much use in a row—even though you're the centre of it. But perhaps I wrong him? Perhaps, if he'd come to know about it, he'd have risen up like a man and flogged that old gorilla within an inch of his life. Can't you see him?"

"Don't laugh about it. You know he couldn't do any such thing. As a matter of fact he *did* hear that his uncle had struck me. Mr. Pike told Charlie himself."

"And Charlie was terrible angry—with you?"

"How d'you know that?"

"Don't I know him?"

"Angry he was—with both of us. He talked pretty straight to his uncle——"

"So he told you."

"And I believe it. He told the old man that such things would get him locked up and that he

was ashamed of him for laying his finger on a woman. And he told him if ever he did such an indecent deed again, he should leave North Combe."

"I should like to have heard him saying it."

"You don't believe me, Reynold?"

"Yes I do. But I'm doubtful of him. You might say that I do and don't believe the man. 'Tis all the way we speak—not the words we use. If I'd said them things to Pike—but with Charlie—I reckon he was about as angry as a wood-pigeon when you take her eggs; and no doubt his uncle cared less for his rage than for the blow of a thistle-seed on the face. You know how your husband quarrels—as gentle as a dove. He can't help it. He's made so. But when he came to talk to you afterwards, I dare say he was braver and bullied you a bit."

She stamped her foot.

"How mean and small you make him! Can't you see the good side of the man?"

"Quite as well as you can. You allow yourself that he was angry with you for having made Pike angry. And that looks mean to me."

"He was right to be angry. I went too far with his uncle. Charlie would never do anything small. He's a man and I'm more—far more—to him than anybody else, his uncle included. You must allow for his peace-loving nature."

"I do. But in this world you have to pay a heavy price for peace, remember. You've got to eat dirt, and offer the other cheek, and tell falsehoods, and hide your own heart. Peace means all the lies that every herd of men be called upon to tell every time they open their mouths. Peace

means saying what you know ban't true, because other people will like you the better for saying it; peace means doing what you despise yourself for doing, because other people will find you more agreeable if you dance to the same tune as them. Peace means other people and what they think—all the time—peace with them—but war with yourself, if you're worth a damn. You know all this—none better."

"If you're a Christian, I suppose you must put the others first."

"Must you? Then thank God you're no more a Christian than me. You don't put your husband's peace afore your own, else that line on your forehead, between your eyes, wouldn't get so deep so quick."

"Marriage makes a woman feel a lot older."

"So much the worse for marriage."

"Welfare is more than peace. If I can lift Charlie——"

"You stagger me!" he burst out. "You—so sane every other way—still to bleat that trash. Lift him! Haven't you lived a year with him? Don't you know what he's made of yet?"

"I do, and I find more reason to hope every day. I go on trying."

"For how long?"

"For ever."

"Minnie Underhill thought the same. Things like that don't go on for ever."

"How can you mention us in the same breath? The Underhills never loved like my husband and I love. They were never like what we are to each other. And I say it, without one pinch of unkindness to either, because I lived with them through the first six months of their married life."

"But they've frightened you a bit?"

"They have not. There's no need for me to see anything in their trouble that makes me frightened for Charlie and myself. Everything is small in the light of love like ours."

"Well, I'm your side and you know it. Your way is to try and waken a bigger conceit of himself in Charlie and my way is to——"

He broke off and began again.

"It's a curious case. Because if I can put a spoke in Pike's wheel, as I must presently—then how do we all stand?"

"Why must you?"

"He forces me to do it. If the old savage will fight, then he shall find me as savage as he is. And I've got more friends than him, so he'll go down. Then what'll Charlie do? He'll tell you I'm an enemy. Yet, from your point of view, if Pike was brought to his marrow-bones and your husband found him going down——"

"He'd stick to him all the more. You don't understand what Charlie feels to him."

"You can't put that right."

"Not yet."

"If the old ruffian knocked you about again——?"

"He won't."

"He may; Charlie can't stop it. You don't know half what I know of Pike, either of you. Your Christian ideas be no more than the wind in the trees to him. He shouts for 'self' and you shout for 'duty'; and the man that's playing for No. 1 always smothers the man that's only playing for principle, because he's in earnest and t'other generally ban't. I'm going to knock the stuffing out of your uncle presently; but I'm not

going to do it by doing my duty. I'm going to do my pleasure."

"What helm is there to steer a man or woman if you take away duty?"

"Why, the love you make such a fuss about."

"And if you love, don't you want to lift and take the burden from the back of them you love?"

"The burden—yes. I want to take your burden, and perhaps I shall some day, if you live long enough. But there's many burdens you can't lift. You can't take a man's character from him and give him a new one; and I never yet met the man or woman who would thank you to try. Everybody's character looks a bit burdensome to everybody else; but only the bearer knows where the shoe pinches, or what he or she would have changed. Take yourself."

"I'd be thankful for patience."

"Cant. You wouldn't. None despises patience more than you do."

"What do I want then?"

He laughed.

"There you are! You don't know. We none of us know what we want—only what we think we want. None will come fearless to his neighbour and say, 'Friend, better me, or show me how I can better myself.'"

"You're not very helpful to-day, Reynold."

"I love you too well to say smooth things. A hawk can't bide in the same cage as a linnet. 'Twould love the little bird so much that 'twould end by eating it."

"You get harder and harder to understand," she said, "and yet I know you only want for me to be happy. Sometimes I ask myself what the

mischievous I've got to worry about, and for my life I can't see."

He was inconsequent.

"I'm always here, and I'm ready to fight all the devils in hell to do you a service," he answered.

"Better fight the bushes and pick me some berries. The dark's coming down."

He worked for her, took out a heavy clasp knife and soon gathered a great pile of holly. He added many sprays of ivy torn off the trees, and from a clump of butcher's broom he cut a sprig or two, with red fruits shining upon the leaves.

"That's for a buttonhole for you," he said, and she thanked him and thrust it into her jacket. He looked at the beautiful round of her bosom.

"I bleat about character, and what we want and what we don't want; and yet all the time I know you're right and I'm wrong," he told her.

"How d'you mean?"

"Why, if you can change one man, you can change another; if you can make one man a thought softer here and there, why shouldn't you make another man a thought harder? If I surprise myself and find myself gentler and quick to make excuses where afore I was quick to trample, mustn't I seek a reason?"

"I'd sooner help you than any man living—but one."

"And if you've helped me, who be I to say others shall be out of the reach of help?"

She glowed and blushed with pleasure through the fading light.

"And now in your turn you've helped me!" she cried. "You've put a glad heart in me. You couldn't have said anything in the world to please me better. 'Tis beautiful to help and be helped."

He sneered at himself even while she spoke, but Lizzie did not see. She was looking away through the woods and her heart went out to the man who had uttered this comforting thought. In her mind was a real flash of hope and joy; in his, more emotions than one contended. He had told her the truth and knew that it would gladden her to hear it; but the deduction he did not really admit. His own love for her he understood and knew its quality. It was not fierce but persistent. He imagined it of the finest temper and made the mistake of supposing that a weaker man than himself could neither love so well nor so finely. But the power and quality of love cannot always be inferred from character. Strong men may be weak lovers and weak men may rise to greatness in that one particular. Dunning did not overrate his own affection for this woman, but he underrated Trevail's; and the comfort—beautiful and sudden as the expiring sunset fires—which Lizzie had won from his final reflection was justified; for the thing that he had said was truer than he knew.

Her own heart told her that it was true, and presently, when they drove away together, she thanked him once more for saying it.

“’Tis long since I ever felt at such peace with myself, or so proud,” she told him. “You, that never lie, declare to me that you’ve got something from me worth having. That in itself is a precious thing for a woman like me to hear; and what follows is better still—because if one, why not another?”

“Leave it,” he answered. “’Tis a stupid act to beat out any thought too thin. But mind, there’s none understands you like what I do, and

none ever will—never! I know a lot that none else knows or ever will know about you. You couldn't marry me; but I married your innermost part, if you understand that."

She did understand, and felt uncomfortable at such an asserted intimacy.

"I'm glad to have you for a friend."

"But, mind you, not every man could have kept your friend like what I did. Trevail couldn't have—not if you had took me instead of him."

She turned the tables then.

"That's the difference between you. Life bites deeper into him. He couldn't have stood by and watched like you. He feels sharper, if he doesn't think so deep."

"D'you suppose that thinking kills feeling?"

"It deadens it."

"You're wrong."

"I'd sooner sing with the bird on the bough, than sit with the toad under the stone."

He laughed.

"That's poetry and not my road. Now I'll light down from your cart and let you go."

Under the opening stars Lizzie drove home alone, and her thoughts were good as she jogged forward to the rustle and whisper of the holly behind her.

CHAPTER XX

ON A WINTER'S MORNING in early February, Lizzie walked alone over Cosdon, for her husband was away on Pike's business and leisure offered. But now it seemed that this holiday would be spoiled, for grey vapours sullied the silver aloft, swallowed it up and smothered Cosdon's head with storm.

Lizzie took refuge amid great stones on the hillside, but only the edge of the rain touched her. The woman was glad and soon she started again to a favourite spot upon the further side of Cosdon. A great wind buffeted her and she pressed against its invisible breast and bent forward. The Moor flashed up with passing sheafs of sunlight that seemed to sink, bog-foundered, in the marshes. They swept about her fitfully; but darkness was the gathering note of the day and Cosdon's shoulders sulked above her as she tramped forward to the west, with her skirts flapping.

She sought a very favourite haunt, where a stream leapt from the hill-side and fell by a little glen to Taw river beneath. This rivulet was linked with happy dreams in Lizzie's mind. The water of it always seemed sweeter than any other. There were holts beside the brook where she would be safe from the rain and might eat her sandwiches and think her thoughts.

She won to her goal before the next storm had sped hurtling over the Belstones, and when it found the side of the Beacon and emptied its grey vials there, Lizzie had reached a dry cranny and could gaze without concern at the hail and rain as they lashed the hill together and left a bleak glimmer of white ice under their passing.

Her thoughts were uncertain as the day, and accident willed that the weather of her mind chimed with what Nature meted to Dartmoor. Doubt beat up now and then against hope; it vanished before some sunny memory; then it swept her once more and left a fleeting chill at heart for the next happier thought to banish.

Upon the whole, however, though the day grew foul and more foul, the woman's mind did not share in this deterioration. She argued herself into a good temper, and her reason told her that to feel otherwise was vain. When fear of her own attitude and doubt as to the future got hold upon her; when disquiet and the brooding sense that she was not justifying existence made her miserable, she always fell back upon the great love that her husband bore her. Differ as they might, argue as they might, she never wearied of hearing him declare his love and joy in her; and if he could not always convince her that her difficulties were ghosts born of a faulty consciousness, yet sometimes he achieved that end; and when he had laid a spectre she felt thankful beyond measure, exalted his cleverness and told herself that she was wrong to be so untrustful concerning Trevail's theory of life. She did not help him much, though daily he assured her that she did. He was stronger than she had guessed in some particulars, weaker in others. At present

he worked hard, but he looked ahead to the time when it would no longer be necessary to do so. Stern circumstances depressed him; physical comfort appeared essential to his mental happiness. He lacked moral courage and paraded instead a very unusual tact in his dealings with other men. He was clever in a diplomatic way; and herein his wife discovered the unsuspected strength. But it was a strength of intellect, and she found it allied with an instinct towards the devious. She knew that Trevail was disingenuous sometimes. He admitted it; but with her he never was. She told herself that she must be above all measure cautious not to bring down this terrible weapon upon herself. She believed then that if he hid a part of his heart from her, she would soon cease to want any of it. She was still at the stage of her marital life when monogamic woman demands all.

This stormy day brought peace, and she turned back presently in a happy frame of mind to a friend. Miss Cann, however, had another visitor, and Lizzie presently found herself in the company of one who was not happy, and for whom happiness must now at best be an uncertain possession hidden in the far future.

Minnie Underhill sat with the old woman. She had returned to her father. As for Tom, he was back at his home, and Emma Jope lived with him.

"I'm telling Minnie here what may be worth your while to know too," said Miss Cann, "and that is that life makes you handsome creatures pay at a ruinous rate."

"The clever, plain women get more out of the world than the silly, pretty ones," declared Mrs. Underhill.

"And even the comely, witty ones, like you, may come to grief," said Fanny Cann, "though I couldn't say a thing like that to you, Minnie, if I wasn't very sure what looks bad for the moment is a blessing in disguise."

"You needn't fear to speak. I never did suffer so much as my father and mother suffered. That's because I was behind the scenes all the time, but took good care they shouldn't be."

"You'm not the sort to speak about your own affairs, and I admire you for it."

"No; but there was a bad side to my silence: they thought I was happy, because I took care not to say I wasn't."

"Though he is my nephew, you know what I think upon it; but to be angry with the weak-minded is to be as bad as them. Men be going down as we be going up. There's no great men now—they've all shrunk into smallness. 'Tis for us to show 'em what they've forgot: the way to be great, if we can."

They drank tea and talked of local matters. Mrs. Underhill had passed through the darkest stages of her tragedy. She did not regard her life as closed.

"To think that girl was barely eighteen!" she said.

"That needn't surprise you," answered the hostess. "A woman can be as wicked and clever at eighteen as at any age. That's where we beat them again. They be slow in everything and don't come to their full wickedness till their hair begins to turn or fall. We're quicker-minded for good or evil. That little toad he's got now—why, she was a man-trap at twelve."

"The people go there just the same," said Minnie.

"Yes. The common, unclean things will like it better now you're away. You was a blast of fresh air in the place, and most men be like vermin—can't abide change. Don't think I've been there since you went, Minnie, because I have not; and more has Lizzie or any other decent woman. I've washed my hands of Tom now. I'll never darken his door again and he knows it."

"What does your husband do?" asked Minnie of Elisabeth.

"He thinks——"

"I don't ask what he thinks: what does he do?"

"Charlie's a man that takes good care to keep out of other people's affairs. He says that 'tis often a very impertinent thing even to pass an opinion on what happens in other homes. He goes to the Arms to meet this man or that and pass the time of day."

"He's one of they wise cowards," said Miss Cann. "For my part I've no great liking for them as keep their mouths shut for caution. Your Charlie's no better than the rest."

"That's quite wrong," answered Elisabeth. "He's a very modest fellow and he shirks taking things on to his shoulders, not because they aren't strong enough to bear them, but because he doubts his own strength."

"Not so," said the man-hater. "He's like they foreign camels I've read about, that know to an ounce what's their load and make a proper fuss if you put too much on 'em. He won't stand loading and has the craft to know it."

"You mustn't quarrel with my husband, Miss

Cann, for that's the same as quarrelling with me."

"I felt like that once," said Minnie Underhill.

The talk waxed desultory but always returned to the theme in their minds. Tom Underhill's mother and her attitude to the incident was mentioned by Fanny Cann.

"Just to show what women are," she said, "and just to show how motherhood may poison their instincts, you can't do better than look at my sister, Martha Underhill. Now there's a woman that was wont to think pretty much as I do. And now where are we? Where's her religion now?"

"You mean she's her son's side," suggested Lizzie.

"Of course she is. What was her word to me last week when I was over to Throwleigh? 'Much happens, Fanny, that we can't understand or explain,' she says. 'And this break between my daughter-in-law and Tom is like that. None be more sorrowful than me; but out of sorrow comes rejoicing,' says Martha, 'and Tom's far too clever a man to take a leap in the dark. He's done this with his eyes open, for his peace—and for Minnie's peace.' Yes, she said that. 'For Minnie's peace. And Tom be happier than I've known him this two years; and I'm very hopeful that Minnie will soon be the same.' That's her cowardly mother's way. But if you'd done it, I'd like to know what Martha would have thought then!"

It was dark before they parted. The things that Lizzie had said and her hearty sympathy attracted the woman who had failed as a wife. They left Miss Cann together and walked side by side for some distance.

"You've got eyes in your head," said Minnie, "and I always knew you had; but I didn't know you'd thought so much. With all your cleverness, I'm a bit surprised you didn't take a bit more to Miss Cann's view."

"She never loved a man."

The other sighed.

"Lucky her! Well, here's my way. I must get home. I'd like to see you again. I'll come over and visit you one day."

"Please do, I'd be proud, Mrs. Underhill."

"Don't call me that. Call me 'Minnie.' I wonder how many have looked back at their old maiden names and hungered to return to them and all that they mean? You've comforted me to-day. You link up things in a way I haven't heard in my family. Good-bye."

She shook hands and that subtle, horrible, unconscious sense of the future—an endowment of such women—drew Lizzie to the deserted wife.

She spoke on an impulse.

"I wish you'd left him!" she said.

"Don't you wish that," answered the elder. "'Tisn't worthy of you. I wouldn't do much different if it had to come over again—not much. But one thing I'd do. I'd take greater care of myself. If I could sink to wish anything, Lizzie, where all wishing is but foolishness now, 'twould be that my little one had lived. Oh my God, how different it would all have been then!"

It was dark and Mrs. Trevail could not see the other's face. Nor did Minnie stop for more words. She walked quickly away, while Elisabeth stood some moments in astonished thought.

At the time of the catastrophe, Tom's wife, true

to family traditions, had maintained a stoical composure before the misfortune of a still-born child. Her husband it was who suffered most in the event; and now, looking back, the listener perceived that had Minnie revealed her heart a little to him, much good might have come from it. Had she wept when Tom was wet-eyed; had——

Lizzie broke out of her futile thoughts impatiently and went home. But introspection's intermittent fever never left her mind for long. She probed her own attitude that night at the edge of sleep; and she found that unconsciously her feminine company had aroused a wave of anti-masculine instinct. The discovery amused her. She turned over, snuggled to her sleeping Charlie and kissed the back of his neck.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN MINNIE UNDERHILL declared that Mrs. Trevail had the art to link things up, she paid the younger woman a just compliment. Some twist of brain matter had furnished Lizzie with an unconscious art of relation hardly to have been expected from her ancestry or training. She possessed a little of that gift of synthesis which may be held the supreme test of intellectual breadth; but in excess it paralyses action, and, while a proper endowment to the metaphysician, often stands between a worker and the deed to be done. The more possible courses, the longer delay in decision.

Elisabeth's instinct was to survey those strands that bound her husband to his environment and judge which most galled and impeded. Had she been able to prove her contention, Trevail would doubtless have broken away where possible; but the relations that she most wished to see modified were those on which he held the welfare of his life depended. In many minor matters she gave way and did not press him, but she believed him seriously mistaken in some vital particulars; and it annoyed him that he was unable to convince her of error.

His mind was small and established no large relations. Indeed he held that to limit interests

was wise and to evade responsibility, sagacious. He looked to his uncle first and last and knew that Abraham Pike would resent any activities that embraced other interests than his own.

Lizzie saw this clearly enough, but she believed it to be a fatal error. That Pike should dominate her husband's finer mind with his coarse one, she felt to be death for Trevail. She began to feel that his uncle was ruining Charlie. They wrangled, but they loved on. Their differences always ended with an embrace, and each secretly determined to go a little way further to meet the other. But sometimes a breath of real acerbity sprang from argument, and the man was generally responsible for it. With the usual male instinct he held his brain the clearer and the larger. Therefore sometimes she annoyed him by what appeared a wilful blindness and lack of common sense. Had they stopped to define his favourite expression; had they weighed the meaning of 'the main chance,' some nearer approach to understanding might have arisen from the examination.

He, too, had grievances against her, but he had never formulated them until an occasion when she returned from the Beacon late and found him injured. He had cut his hand badly, and since she was away from home at the time of the accident, he had been at some difficulty to wash and bind the wound with the help of a clumsy girl.

He greeted her angrily when she came back in a reflective temper.

"I wish to God you'd mind your proper work and stop here a bit more instead of messing about on that damned hill and always being out of the way when I want you," he began.

She saw his hand and was all concern. He rated her while she took off the blood-stained binding and prepared to make him more comfortable.

"If you could only see yourself; but that's what you never do or try to do. You're always at me to throw up this and throw up that and make friends of strangers and show at the shows and do a thousand silly things; but you never get tit-for-tat; you never hear me say where you might learn a bit more sense."

"I'm always very ready to listen, Charlie."

"Well, listen now then. I say this business of mooning on Cosdon is foolish nonsense and worse—wicked nonsense. You can't see yourself, but I can, and I tell you that I've got quite as much cause to be vexed with you as you have to be vexed with me. I know what it's doing. It's getting on your nerves and altering your disposition. It's cruel work and I'm getting sick of it."

"It only brisk up my mind and makes me take larger ideas for us both. It's always done that."

"A lump of mud and stones can't alter a woman's brains and make her think all wrong. It isn't Cosdon—I won't believe it. It's that sharp-tongued old devil up there that's got a bee in her bonnet and hates men—just because they are men. If you listen to her twaddle, I suppose you think the same."

"That's better," she said, speaking of his hand. "No wonder you're vexed. And I'm sure I'm ashamed to think of myself wandering about and you wanting me. 'Twill be all right in the morning. It's clean."

She gave him his tea and explained that she had not seen Miss Cann.

"Don't you think she influences me against men. Men have made the world what it is; and it's no good for us women pretending they haven't. And so long as they can make us love 'em, they'll have the whip hand. And don't you be cross with your Lizzie, because she won't stand it. You know I never think for anybody but you; I never worry and plan and plot for anybody but you. I'll not vex you again. 'Tis only my love and longing to be of use that makes me do it. I can't bear to be outside your life. I want to be in it—part of it, being helpful and wanted and cried out for. And we see alike in so much that the things where we don't are nothing by comparison."

They both knew that this was not true, but Trevail relented at this soft answer and expressed instant regret for his heat.

"We must give and take," he said. "I know you're as right as possible. I'm a lot more ambitious than I used to be. I think in hundreds where I used to think in tens. I've opened my old man's eyes in some directions, I can tell you. I've got a larger mind than him, though not so many horse power."

"A larger mind! I should think you had, Charlie. Don't compare yourself to him."

"'Tis all nonsense what I said. 'Twas only the sting of this gash over my fingers. And don't you think I'm going to sing small for ever. I've got big ideas in my head; but I mean to keep them there for a bit."

Thus amity was restored between them; but the woman remembered the sharpest speeches

she had ever heard from her husband. They interested her; they did not hurt her in the least. Trevail had no more power to hurt her than a child has to hurt its guardian; and there was a danger in that. She felt dispirited at her failures, but blamed herself, not him; and when he was annoyed she instantly set about to soothe him. She loved him as well as ever, but she loved herself too. She had planned her life's work beautifully knit into her life's love. Whether, with passage of time, the failure of the one would destroy the other remained to be seen. As yet the question had not occurred to her and she felt quite unprepared to accept failure. Indeed there were not wanting many minor evidences of success.

There came a day when spring had returned again and Trevail was with his sheep. Then 'Iron' Pike swept into Lizzie's kitchen.

"Where's the man?" he asked.

"With the ewes. He'll be back to dinner in an hour."

"Tell him I want him—sharp. He's got to do something for me this afternoon and it won't keep."

"I'll tell him, uncle."

He had not seen her for two months.

"Be us friends?" he said.

"Depends on you."

He looked her up and down with his naked stare.

"No child coming yet?"

She was not more troubled than had a horse or dog regarded her.

"No."

"So much the better. Mind, the minute he's

swallowed his food I want him at Zeal. And bid him put on tidy clothes."

He went out and then returned.

"When's your birthday?"

She told him.

"I've got a gift for you."

He departed and she laughed to herself. But the laugh died swiftly. She loathed to hear her husband ordered about in this fashion by a savage.

Trevail was with his uncle soon after two o'clock, and he wore his market suit of grey tweed, riding-breeches and yellow leggings.

He found the old man impatient and perturbed.

"It's the quarry," he said. "That blasted chap at Oxenham House is one of the polite sort, and I can't get him to come to grips. The lease runs out in two years from Michaelmas and I want to renew it and have done with it. There's one or two after it a'ready, and that devil, Dunning, have been seen up at the House."

"Have you been up?"

"Twice. Fust time he wouldn't see me, because he was engaged, and second time, afore I'd been with the man two minutes, he rang for one of his male servants and had me shown out. Plain English ban't no good to him, so I want for you to go up this afternoon. I've found out he's to home and I want in so many words to know if he'll renew my lease, and if he won't, why he won't."

"Perhaps 'tis a bit too soon to go into it."

"Be damned to that! Nothing can be done too soon when you've got a lot of sly rogues trying to chouse you out of your own. I've a right to

the refusal of the lease and he can't in justice give it to any man over me."

"Perhaps he's going to put up the rent."

"Then why don't he say so and be straight instead of crooked?"

"What did he say to you?"

"Nought. Wouldn't discuss it. He had his ideas as to the future of the quarry, but in his opinion the time wasn't ripe or some such jargon."

"He'll say the same to me."

"Not if you use your wits. You know how to soap over these men and get 'yes' or 'no' out of 'em—I don't. So go along to him and then come back here."

The farmer went immediately and presently spoke with a young man who had lately entered into his patrimony. The estates were involved, and the heir felt impressed with the fact that his revenues ought to be far higher than they were.

Trevail pleased him with a display of civility and respectful sympathy. He knew something of the young man's problems and hinted that he was already popular in the district. Upon the subject of the quarry, however, the owner was not prepared to dwell.

"I couldn't discuss the matter with Mr. Pike, because he made such a noise and forgot himself. The facts are clear enough: the quarry is worth a higher rent than he pays, and at the termination of his lease the rent will be raised to the next tenant."

"Certainly, sir. If it's worth more, you ought to get more for it. I'm sure my uncle will see that. But he's proud of the quarry and has built up a steady business on it, and he feels that, perhaps, you wouldn't take it amiss if he

asked for the first refusal of the new lease. He's been a good tenant for a great many years now, and I don't think that anybody in these parts would work it better or keep all the machinery in such good going order."

"I've nothing to grumble at. But I'm not prepared to commit myself to any promise. Mr. Pike has the place for two years yet. At the end of that time I may invite tenders, or devise some other scheme for the quarry."

"You won't give him any advantage by reason of his long lease and good tenancy?"

The younger man considered.

"I want to be reasonable. I will say nothing at present. You had better act for him and see me or my agent again on this subject next Michaelmas twelvemonth. By that time I shall have straightened things out a little, I hope. This will serve as a reminder to us both."

He made a memorandum and handed it to Tremain.

The latter thanked him and added a few more words on Pike's behalf.

"He's rough, but he's a good sort, and your quarry be more to him than anything in the world. Wrapped up in it you might say. And he wanted me to say that if you meant to lime the big field under the wood, he'd esteem it a great favour to have twenty tons ready for you for nothing when you're ready for it."

"On no account. I shall be buying the lime presently, and shall, of course, come to my quarry for it. And I trust Mr. Pike may prove to be the future tenant. Other things being equal, I shall favour him. Don't let him come here, however. His manners annoy me."

"His bark is worse than his bite, sir."

"No doubt; but I hate men who bark."

Trevail took his leave with a courtesy and deference natural to him; and presently another of his inherent qualities appeared in a subsequent conversation with Abraham Pike.

He related the substance of his interview, but he was politic and tempered it. An independent hearer had gathered from his narrative more promise for the present tenant than really existed. But the old man was not very grateful to his nephew. He had hoped for something definite. It was his way to look ahead, and uncertainty upon a subject so vital as the limestone quarry exasperated him.

CHAPTER XXII

MINNIE UNDERHILL had to make choice between a judicial separation, under which the law would prevent her husband from marrying again until her death; or a divorce at the end of two years from her desertion. She decided upon the latter course; and now nearly half the time was gone when her name rose upon two tongues, where Elisabeth Trevail and Reynold Dunning talked beside the quarry pool.

The leaves had fallen and a network of grey and brown boughs made tender colour round the tarn. Mist hung about the place and all the tones of ink-black water and shadowy banks were sombre, save where, springing from the cliff face, there towered twin birches silvery bright. Silence homed here in an hour at the edge of dusk. Only the voices of the man and woman broke it. She sat on the edge of Pike's punt, which had been drawn up out of the water; and Dunning stood beside her.

"Minnie's in London along with her brother. He lost his wife three months ago, and she's gone to look after him for a bit. I almost envy her sometimes."

"Because Tom chucked her?"

"Good gracious no! Because she's in London. I hated it when I left it—but now—sometimes—

I can't help wondering if 'twould do Charlie good to be there."

"'Twould choke him. Charlie won't stand transplanting. He's like a maggot in a pear. Pull him out and he'll die."

"He's so uneven—my Charlie. Talk of women being uneven! I've often thought that I've got him to see at last, and fallen to sleep with a light heart. Then, in the morning, he's gone back on it."

"Got him to see what?"

"You know well enough."

"You're not the woman you were."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked starting and staring into his face.

"The same to me—the same to me—more to me for that matter. But not to him."

"Whose fault if——?"

"There you begin with your parrot question. I've told you fifty times there's no fault in either of you."

"I'm not the same to him—not quite—I grant you."

"And he's not the same to you?"

She sighed.

"Nothing is. Hope's not the same. I used to fall back on hope. And it never failed me. But now—sometimes—even the Beacon——"

"The Beacon's the Beacon, and though I always told you that you talked a good bit of nonsense about it, still it have left its mark on you and you're different from what you would have been if you'd never climbed it."

"Charlie went up with me a bit ago. 'Twas one of our happy Sundays. We see nearer together in many things."

"Is he altering you then? Is he making you hungrier to be snug and comfortable? Is he bringing you to like Pike any better?"

"Yes he is. He's making me like my uncle better."

"Pike himself may be making you like him better. What you like about Pike is what you like about me. 'Tisn't Charlie have made you. He can't alter your nature by a hair; and more can you alter his. He may pretend and even do things; but 'tis all against the grain."

"And don't things done for love become a habit, like other habits? Can there be a better reason to do good things than for love of her that begs you to do them?"

"Love—love—you always drag in love! There's not enough fuel in the man to keep love burning."

"That's not true."

"It must be. Ashes be the end of every fire, so sure as flame be the beginning."

"'Tis the beautiful efforts that he makes. Wouldn't any woman love him for that? I know how hard it often is to him. But he does try hard to do my bidding."

"I know it—poor devil."

"You think to hurt me by saying that."

"Hard to do your bidding"! I shouldn't have found it hard. I loved you a million times fiercer than he loves you; because I'm a million times fiercer myself. But suppose you belonged to me and I set out to mould you into my pattern——?"

"Well, what if you did? Aren't we all moulding somebody, or trying to?"

"I shouldn't do it to hurt. I shouldn't mould you. You'd mould yourself. We'd change

each other, like whetstone and scythe. I shouldn't preach and bore you, like you bore Charlie."

She showed annoyance.

"How can you say that?"

"Of course you bore him. Don't the old parson to church bore you with his sermons?"

"How little you know what our life is."

He yawned.

"Let's go to the quarry," he answered. "The old badger's away to-day and I want to have a look at it."

But she was not disposed to change the subject.

"I've got Charlie to admit that money isn't everything anyway."

"Ah!"

"The things that can be bought aren't worth buying," she declared. "Look at them—goods, land, men, women. The things that have no price are the things worth winning."

"And those are just the things you can't win and never will at North Combe. 'Tis a poor world, where the only real treasures are a matter of chance and luck. Look at me—money gets easier and easier to come by as your pile grows. But of the things worth having I've got none—none—none. Like 'Iron' Pike there again—with this difference, that he don't want the things worth having—and I do."

"You ought to be able to win them."

They stood above the quarry now and sight of it thrust the tenant into Dunning's mind.

He lifted his eyes to the massive 'over-burden.' Many tons of worthless matter had to be removed regularly, at a price which largely lessened the value of the stone below.

"And so your old savage says he can't offer to pay much more rent for this place? What's his reason?"

"He's got fifty. The cost of moving the rubbish and the fact that farmers take more and more to foreign manures and chemicals and want less and less lime."

He nodded.

"That's true. But presently—before very long I hope—they'll be crying out for brown lime again."

"Are you trying for it?"

"You know I am."

"Uncle would sooner any living man had it than you."

"He's like a donkey carrying bread for others to eat—your uncle; but he doesn't know that yet. You'd think he was too clever—wouldn't you? Yet the money wasted here——"

He looked into the quarry. Already darkness began to fall upon it.

"I like it when everything gets all blurred and gloomy and solemn," she said.

But now he changed the subject again and showed her that he had not forgotten a previous remark.

"I'm the strong sort and Charlie's the good sort—that's how it stands between us—eh?"

"And always did."

"What is there about goodness that takes your fancy such a lot?"

"What a question!"

"Good—when you've said a man's good it cuts off everything else. He's good, and there's nothing more to be said. Good—what for? Good to send you to sleep—like a soft bed. Is that all

you ax of a man? Is the Beacon good? No, by God!"

"'Tis the contrast from my Charlie that makes me like Cosdon."

"No it isn't. You liked Cosdon afore you liked him. 'Tis the contrast from Cosdon that made you like him. 'Twas a silly, thoughtless act to set yourself to like him. And I'll tell you another thing. You know, but you'd rather not know it. And 'tis this: I interested you afore he did. Didn't I?"

She made no answer, and her silence satisfied Dunning.

"The dimpsy be falling," he said. "Are you going to ax me in for a cup of tea?"

"Of course: you came for that."

He laughed.

At North Combe Trevail was already arrived and they ate and drank together.

Between the men obtained a reticent friendship. The younger was a little jealous of Dunning—as he was a little jealous of Cosdon Beacon; and in the same sense. He held that Lizzie won no good of him. But they differed only upon the question of Dunning's opinions, for the master of North Combe entertained no fear of his old rival. Cordiality, however, was impossible at any time with Reynold, and least of all between him and the nephew of Abraham Pike.

Both knew that a day was coming when their interests must violently clash on a major issue, and Trevail was now working hard upon his uncle's side to preserve the quarry to him. They never spoke of it, and Lizzie's husband was astonished to hear the other do so now.

"I'll talk business half a minute, Trevail, if you

please," he said, when the meal was done and both loaded their pipes.

"What about?"

"You've got sense, though your uncle has not. He goes driving on, like a steam roller, and it answers all right when you've only got to flatten a road or ride rough-shod over fools. But it don't answer in this matter and you know it don't—else you wouldn't be so busy for him."

"I'd rather not discuss it."

"As you please. I speak out of friendship. I am not troubled for him. Him and me will fight like a pair of bull-terriers till one of us drops. But I don't like you to waste your time. I want you to do well and keep snug and untroubled. Trouble isn't good for you. 'Tis the warm sun sweetens you, not the frost. So I tell you in a word that I shall get the quarry promised to me next fall, and not even your clever tongue will beat me. I know how to win, and you don't; so you'd better save your time and make him understand that after next Michaelmas he'll enter on his last year."

"Since when did you take to bluff, then?"

"I've no use for bluff. I never talk off book to man or woman."

He looked at Elisabeth who was clearing the tea things.

"No," he continued, "I never tell as truth what ain't dead true."

"I have the first refusal, however. Perhaps you didn't know that?"

"Yes; but 'twill be a question of tender."

"And if my uncle doesn't know how to work it cheaper than anybody else in the world after all these years, who should?"

"That's the point. He doesn't know. However, I didn't want to talk about it more than to say that if a hundred tenders went in, I should win."

"You know more about the quarry than we do then?"

"I've only spoken for friendship and to save you trouble. Tell your old man to fling up the sponge and go without a fuss. He's bested me often enough and will again; but in the matter of the quarry—no—'tis mine."

Trevail and his wife were impressed with this finality of statement. Dunning never bragged.

"Have you got an understanding with Sir Ralph?"

"Not I."

"If you offer better money for it than Pike, you either don't know what you're doing, or else know a lot more about the place than us."

"Well, I leave you to guess which. Anyway, Lizzie here shall always be free to wander there and see faces in the cliffs, as she do now. And I'll make you special terms for your lime if you'll cart it yourself. You shall have it cheaper from me than from your own uncle—and the blackberries shall be hers too."

"We shan't stop at North Combe for ever," said Lizzie.

"Shan't you? You must come over to Clannaboro' presently. I want to show you a new knife for mangel, Charles."

He picked up his hat and departed abruptly without farewell, according to his custom. Behind him he left soreness in two hearts. Trevail was troubled about the quarry and Elisabeth about herself. She had no immediate opportunity for

thought, however, because her husband began to question her closely.

"'Tis going to be the biggest fight we've ever yet had," he said, "and I reckon that you might be useful to us. You're as thick as thieves with the man, and what's the good of that if we can't win something out of it?"

She showed surprise.

"Whatever do you mean, Charlie?"

"Well, 'tis craft for craft, surely? You see he has a secret and if I had it—— If we know what he knows, we could tend as he tends; and so we should win. Can't you see?"

"You don't mean I should try and get his secret out of him?"

"If he has one—certainly. And I believe he has. 'Twould be a clever thing to score off him if we could. And if we don't, he'll score off us. You're our side anyway."

"I'm not one side more than the other."

"Aren't you, by God? Then you ought to be!"

"For some things I'd be rather glad if uncle didn't get it. He'd keep away more then," she said.

"'Twould pretty well kill him to lose it—if Dunning got it."

She laughed and he grew angry.

They quarrelled and did not make it up for two days. He was much incensed that she refused to help him; and she was hurt that he could propose such a course. In her eyes dishonour clung to him for suggesting it.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE FIRST DAY of March the earth was frozen in yard and croft; cattle with steaming breath gnawed great yellow roots, or tugged at trusses of hay. The birds, tamed by the weather, could almost be handled; plover ran about at the edge of the farmyards. A stream that ran at the bottom of the Zeal meadows was feathered and scurfed with ice, beneath which strange blobs and blotches of darkness passed along—oily and amorphous—to mark where running water worked its way through prisoned air. The spring was tardy and scarce showed a sign as yet, save where the lemon tassels of the hazel shivered.

Here Trevail, moving early, met with the master of the Oxenham Arms. Only the frozen streamlet separated them and Charlie crossed it.

He had not the vocabulary to shade his meaning very clearly in certain arguments now of frequent occurrence at home; and the result was that he often conveyed a wrong impression, was more positive than he meant to be sometimes, and at others undertook more than he proposed. After the failure of such a promise, and his subsequent explanation that he had meant less than his wife assumed, moments of bitterness passed between them. Because words are responsible for more

tribulation than deeds; and if those who use them skilfully so often fail on some sheer breakdown of verbal definition, it will readily be perceived how fruitful a source of difference must the spoken word become amongst that greater number who lack exactitude of diction or of thought. His wife had just told Trevail that he had said what was not true, and he smarted under the accusation, because he was conscious of having done no such thing.

He came in gloom to a cheerful man, for Underhill had an item of news which he longed to impart.

"My luck's in," he said, "and I'd sooner you and your wife knew it than most."

"What good fortune's happened?"

"Minnie's going to marry a Londoner; and now that sad affair be happily at an end. I heard from her lawyer, and I wrote a letter, and I'd send her a wondrous fine present, but that I know 'twould be sent back."

"You be married too they tell me."

"Yes, it's known now, though a month and more old—to please Jope. The law's a very funny thing and the church be a funnier thing still. You see, when I left Minnie and took up with Emma, 'twas desertion and adultery, but not cruelty, so she couldn't divorce me. The law wouldn't let her. She could have got separated, but if she'd done that, she couldn't have had a divorce after. So she waited two years, at the law's command, and all that time me and Emma was living in what the church calls sin. You'd think, wouldn't you, that the law and the church would pull together to stop such a disgrace if they really cared a brass button for morals? So far

as I can see 'tis only very silly people want either contrivance."

"I'm glad Minnie has found the right man."

"Not so glad as me."

"How's business?"

"Never better."

"And what's the difference between Minnie and Emma, Tom? We're old friends or I wouldn't ask such a home question; but I've got a reason for asking."

"The difference be one of understanding. The difference be a little more dust in the corners of the rooms and perhaps a broken window-pane waiting for mending and the fires not lit quite so early on winter mornings. Custom's the same—neither worse nor better. As to my comfort, you can see it in my waistband. I'm getting too fat altogether. 'Twas one of the things Minnie was always on to. For ever at me, poor dear, to take walking exercise and so on. But of course I shall go like my father, in my sixties; and I know it, and what the hell's the good of pretending otherwise?"

"Emma's an understanding girl?"

"A masterpiece. I'm silly even when I think of her. She'd beard the devil for me."

"Don't ever cross you?"

"Not she. Plans the very fun I like afore I've thought of it. Talks when I want to talk; shuts up when I want to think; comes cuddling to me when I'm down; keeps out of the way when I'm busy; be in my lap afore the word's out of my lips when I'm in a merry mood. If I'm thirsty, she's at the beer barrel afore I can get there; if I'm hungry, she hastens dinner. If I'm off writing letters, I find she's answered them; if—

but, damn it, what's the good of telling you all this, Charlie? Don't you know it? Ban't you one of the lucky ones too?"

"Yes, thank God; but Lizzie's—well, in a word, she's a very high-minded woman."

"So she is then; and didn't Minnie often say so? 'No common girl' she always called your wife. They was like each other in a way. Like will to like, and you know by now without my telling you what a high stand your wife takes. Minnie be marrying a big man by all accounts—a hotel proprietor up Paddington way. Lord! how London dirt will try that woman! But she'll fight it and conquer it of course. A proud creature, and I've always wondered what the devil she saw in me. And though I told her a score of times that I couldn't soar to her lofty standpoint, she never would believe it."

"Did you ever try?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Underhill, "God's my holy judge I did try, and many a time you might say I was breathless and sore with trying. But there 'tis—in a word, the one thing she never could grasp was the simple fact that a pint measure won't hold a quart."

Trevail listened to this genial discourse and understood it; yet, feeling a great intellectual and moral gulf between himself and Mr. Underhill, he despised the publican. He had confessed a little of similar sort to himself; he had declared like opinions to Lizzie; but to none else had he admitted such disparities and, in his cool moments, he did not admit them at all.

"I hold with differences between man and wife. They are the cogs in the wheel and help each other along. Lizzie and I don't always see alike.

But often and often I convince her that she's mistaken."

"Well done you!" said Mr. Underhill. "That's your cleverness. If a man can do that—then it's all right."

"Yes, Lizzie will show me a thing, for a woman's mind sees much that we miss; and I'll show her a thing; and so she helps me and I help her. I see the force of her ideas. Now in your case, you never saw the force of Minnie's—eh, Tom?"

"No, I felt the force. She despaired of me; and 'tis very uneasy going if a woman despairs of her husband. I'm not a proud man as you know, but if you're dead certain your wife thinks you're past praying for, it makes you down-daunted."

"It weakens love no doubt."

"That's so; you can't long love a party that despises you—unless you're a dog."

"Not that I go all the way with my wife always," continued the farmer. "With us we give and take."

"And that's the whole art of living," summed up Tom. "Now a bit of fluff in the corner of a room or a cobweb hanging from the ceiling leaves me free to go on living my life quite easily. And with you I suppose you're content to let the future take care of itself. But there's a pattern of people who have no use for the present, but be always planning the time to come; though I say, 'Let sleeping dogs lie and don't try and do Time's work for him.'"

"Lizzie wants me to plunge out, you know. She thinks I'm very clever and all that, and naturally I don't want to make myself small in my wife's eyes."

"Who does? But man must be at the helm. We can't let women steer the ship, Charlie."

"A real busy woman wants to be busy in everything."

"Gospel truth. If I don't know, who should? That's where you are cleverer than I was no doubt, and have kept the whip hand."

"I shall never lose it, Tom."

"Mind you don't. Dunning was saying——"
But Trevail interrupted.

"Now there's a man I don't reckon be much use to any woman."

"Perhaps not; but for acid sense you won't beat him. His speech bites like mustard."

"And if he can't sting, he keeps silent."

"I won't say that. He stuck up for me well—all the time."

"There's that in him that blinds the women."

"He didn't blind your woman anyway."

"No; because she's the rare sort that knows her own mind and can't be choked off it. But sometimes I'm not sure if Dunning's wholesome. We're very good friends and all that; but the man has a way to throw cold water on life and make it look poor—just because his own's so empty."

"Pity he can't find a wife."

"He told me slap out that there had only been one woman for him in all his life, and that woman was my wife. I gasped in his face. And he laughed in mine. He's a caution. And for my part I can't say I care about him. Why don't he try to be more like other people?"

Tom Underhill laughed.

"We always feel a bit unrestful with a mind that's built on a strange pattern to our own."

"In his case I couldn't be a friend exactly—even if I wished it. There's my uncle to be thought upon."

"'Iron' Pike was so near market merry as ever I saw him in my bar last night. He's just had a terrible big score off Dunning and drank half a bottle of gin on the strength of it."

"Dunning has been laid up—got a chill or something—and my uncle cut him out over a useful lot of ponies that bankrupt at Belstone had to sell. Dunning couldn't do anything for the minute, and so we had it all our own way."

"I didn't know the man had been ill."

"Lizzie went but last week to ask for him, and she took a dainty or two. But I expect he gave 'em to his dogs."

"'Tis just a thing he would do—under her nose for her to see him do it."

They parted presently, but not before the master of the Oxenham Arms had asked another personal question.

"And how does your old boy get on with the missis? I remember when Lizzie was with us that he always said she had more sense than most females."

"They get on very fair most times. She don't like him—can't see his good side in fact. But 'tis all right. He gave her a wedding present—a gold brooch as he had off that widow-man, Chastey, for a bad debt."

"Come! That's pretty good for him. 'Twill soon bring Dunning on his legs again—to see how busy you and your uncle can be when he's laid by."

Trevel crossed to his own side of the stream again and the men parted.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON COSDON'S EASTERN FLANK, between the summit and South Tawton Common flung out below, there runs a triple row of stones. The shattered monument extends from east to west and its fragments are thrust at all angles from the supporting earth. Seen now, in a spring gloaming, they appeared to totter up the hill, like an army of weary grey trolls, that crept through the fading light to their home in the mountain's heart.

The rows, however, led to no cavern of treasure. They terminated at broken cairns; and on the fragments of a grave Elisabeth Trevail now sat and waited for the coming of a man. She liked the 'cemetery,' as this spot was called, and wondered often for what these ancient stones, here thrust awry by weight of centuries, once meant to the vanished folk who raised them. She had imagination to dream over the problem; and then, reflecting upon the night of time into which those people had sunk, remembering that these splinters of granite were all that remained to tell of either sorrow or joy, she turned from them with a cold heart. The spectacle of that dreamless past set against the fiery and flying present saddened her. She clung to time, yet envied something in the case of the vanished

Stone men; for their tribulations were ended, their problems solved, their pains forgotten.

The present now appeared to her in the shape of Reynold Dunning. He had been fishing not far distant and had mistaken their tryst.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting; but I'd got into my head we were to meet in the old place, under the blackthorns by the brook. I've brought you a brave basket of trout. They're going like tigers to-day."

He slung an old creel off his shoulders and sat down beside her.

This man's attitude toward Lizzie was one of Oriental patience. Love in no way filled his life, otherwise such an ordeal must have proved impossible; but the passion leavened the lump of his days. In a word he believed that a time must come when Trevail and his wife would part. He stood as a spectator deeply interested, and did not meddle. He had told Lizzie in plain words more than once that the end was inevitable; but she refused to believe him. That she permitted him to say so and still valued his friendship was significant however. And he knew it. At first these assumptions had startled her; now she was accustomed to them. She admired him as much as before; but whereas she had sought him after marriage to win help from him in her wifely part; whereas she had formerly believed that Dunning's caustic counsels might aid her with her husband; now she came to the master of Clannaboro' for personal refreshment and mental tonic at times of depression. He always did her good; but that he could do Charlie good, she had long given up hoping.

His nullifidian attitude had been accepted by

her almost unconsciously; and this he marked and felt glad. A time was coming, as he guessed, when perhaps the only bar to his hope might appear in faith and superstitious clinging to creed. But that began to fail, and to-day for the first time, the woman herself declared as much.

She asked after his health and he answered that he had entirely recovered.

"'Twas the good things you sent I believe. My old woman can't cook for a sick stomach. How's Charles? Chuckling over they ponies I expect. But only because I was on my back and there was none to fight for me."

"Charlie's all right—very busy for his uncle as usual. If we only had a bigger place, he'd think more for himself."

"Have you dragged him up the Beacon of late?"

"No, and shan't try again. It's silly and indecent between two grown people—like a child being taken by its mother to school. But I'm in hot water myself just now. I said 'twas boring me to death to go to church last week, and my husband took it rather ill. He always puts the face value on a word and don't know how to see 'tis the tone of the voice that shows how much, or little, you may mean. I didn't mean it in earnest exactly; but when he turned round and began to preach, then I decided mighty quick that I did mean it."

"Be yourself and go your own way and stick to what's alive. 'Tis part of Charlie's nature to believe everything he's told to believe. He'll go to anybody and everybody but you for his reasons."

"I'm a woman," she said, "so I needn't look

for reasons. All the same, I'm reasonable enough. So little would do it—so little. Just an ounce of self-respect and—oh, I hate his plans for us. They're so——”

“Yes, I know; and they'll get worse. If at his age he can thirst for a coward's paradise beyond all fear, what d'you think he'll come to presently?”

“Bigger thoughts—if I can make him.”

“Smaller ones, because you can't. All he wants to be is safe—the safety of smallness. All for peace and soft answers to turn away wrath he is. To think you've married a coward—you!”

“I'd leave him sooner!” she cried. “Yes, I would—loving him as I do. But you can't understand that. You can't understand how I might love him too well to stop with him and see——”

“See him shrinking deeper and deeper into his shell—against the buffet of the world—see him growing tamer and tamer and more and more of a—there, what's the use of talking? It will come gradual—so gradual that it won't shock you, I dare say.”

“I'd leave him sooner,” she repeated.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“You know where to come, if you do.”

She said nothing.

“Well, here's the dimpsy coming down and I'll see you on your road. After all, we're talking nonsense and leaving you out of the count altogether.”

“You always do.”

“Only to cool off your hopefulness. You think you're stronger than you are; and think you're weaker than you are. The truth lies

midway. You certainly can't do much; but perhaps it isn't fair to say you can do nought."

"I've told you I can do much."

"Well," he said rising, and lifting up his creel again, "don't you talk to me no more about him. I can't help you there. But talk about yourself as oft as you please. You I can help, and you know there's nothing I better like to do."

"I know that."

"Always remember it. You're the only human creature I'd go across the road for; but for you I'd go to the bitter world's end. There! You little thought to ever hear me make such a fool's speech as that."

"I've got to thank you for many useful words."

He changed the subject.

"My japonica on Clannaboro' be making a brave show. You'd best to come and see it in full blooth a week hence."

"I can't promise," she answered and left him.

At home she found Trevail awaiting her in anger. She had promised to return at tea-time and the hour was now past six o'clock.

He rated her and followed her up to their room when she went to take off her hat and jacket.

"I'm sick of this," he said. "And I'm not going to have it any more. With your mighty fine views, there's one view that you miss and that's the view of your home. You've got to remember you didn't marry me for fun, but for better or worse. I know I'm a failure; but you've got to face that; and you'll do well in future to make friends from those who believe in me, not those who despise me."

"I'm sorry I'm late. I was talking with Reynold Dunning on the Moor."

"Of course; and he was telling you what a damned fool I am—and a few other things. Well, he may be right; but you're not. You're wrong—dead wrong—to listen while your husband's sneered at; and, in a word, I won't have it—d'you hear?—I won't have it. I've been a good husband to you, though you don't think so; and now 'tis time you felt the curb."

"Charlie!"

"I mean it. 'Tis your own fault. I hate to say such things, but you've brought them on yourself. I won't have you see that man no more. I forbid you. I'm not jealous or any nonsense like that; but I'm not a fool and I'm not going to sacrifice your peace of mind for another man's amusement."

"How can you think so badly of me?"

"Your peace of mind I say—not mine. I don't care. I'm well used to being always wrong now, and if your lips don't say it, your eyes do. But I'm thinking of you, not myself, and I know, if I know anything, that Dunning's only putting you out of conceit with yourself."

"Charlie, listen to me. I'd rather—why, what is anything to me—anything in the world set against you? And you cut me to the quick when you say that I'm always against you. I'm always on your side—on your best side—and many's the time you've told me so. Think, think, Charlie. What's my life to me away from you? Think of all you've done for me. And am I to do nothing for you?"

"You do too much. That's the whole quarrel. Can't you see how galling for a man it is that his wife should treat him as though she was his mother? Can't you see how damned sickening

it is for a man to know his wife talks about him to another man, and asks for advice as to how to improve him?"

"I never did that."

"Yes, you did. If not, what do you talk about to Dunning and Fanny Cann and Lord knows who else? If I was to go running about like that, what would you say? I'm myself and I'm going to take my own views of life, not yours; and have my own ambitions, not yours; and live my own way, not yours. And if my way don't suit you, then set about trying to make it suit you. I love you with all my heart, and how hard I've tried to please you and shall again you'll never guess. But for God's sake stick to me and grumble to me and plague me with your fine ideas; and I'll do all I know how; but don't run about to other people—'t isn't decent and 't isn't fair."

He threw a new light and showed a sensitiveness and perception for which she had never given him credit.

She did not answer immediately; then she put her arms round him and held him close and kissed him. He looked away and frowned for a moment; but he was always clay at her touch. His expression changed.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry; I'm very, very sorry," she said. "I see what you mean and you're right enough. I love you and worship you, Charlie—same as you do me; and I'll come to you—only you; and I'll not hurt you, or goad you with my stupid ideas. I'm a fool to do it, for what man would stand it? Dunning told me once that I should bore you to death with my preaching, and he was right. I'm ashamed."

"You don't preach and 'twas damned cheek of

the man to use the word. I love well to listen to you, and you know how much you've done for me and will yet do. But if you fail here and there, don't tell other people. Our life's too precious a thing to be stripped naked for Dunning to see. I'm sorry I forbade you to see him. That's silly, of course. See him when you please and where you please; but——"

She was genuinely sorry and she respected him greatly at that hour. But he spoiled all before the day was done.

"I want to double our savings in the next two years," he said. "I don't intend to see you working for ever, and I don't intend to work for ever myself neither. You weren't built to labour but with your brains. Money's the thing, and you'll find 'tis very much easier to take large ideas with a large purse than without. The future's as plain sailing as need be. We've only got to keep Uncle stroked the right way. And I've long learned how to do that. One has to eat a bit of dirt now and again, but nobody's any the wiser and the game's worth the candle."

He talked on in this strain and endeavoured to set their unique good fortune before her. He argued that by pursuing his policy their ultimate position would be secured.

"Then you'll be able to play fine lady, if you like, and be the first to see I was in the right. 'Tis only that I look further ahead and don't live so much in the moment," he explained. "But you don't quite see our luck. Most times them as have the power to get the full flavour out of the world haven't got the means; and others, who have the means haven't got the power; but us—why, what could fall out better? Come presently

we shall have both the power and the means. The power's yours, Lizzie, and the means shall be mine. There's fortune!"

"I don't want you to lose your——"

"Stop!" he said. "Not a word on the other side to-night. You must look at it all my way to-night. And if you steadfastly look at it my way, then sooner or late you'll see it my way. Leave your happiness in my keeping; trust my love, if you can't trust my wits. Don't love sharpen every man's wits, for that matter?"

Thus he struck a wrong note at the finish and left her disturbed. She was incapable of trusting his weaker will or respecting his system. Life stood between them exactly as it had always stood. If she could not change him, she would never be content with him; yet to-day he set about changing her; he preached utility to her. The positions were reversed; and she told herself that if her counsel struck as vainly on her husband's ear as his now fell upon hers, then most certainly no hope of a true communion was ever possible between them. But she did not give up hope. Influenced he must be, because his was a nature bound to take its colour from other natures. Its native tone was nought; therefore, since it was inevitable that he must be influenced, she and not another should exercise the control and tinge his pellucid simplicity. She was, of course, convinced that her way and only her way would meet the case of Trevail. But in one direction he made her reflect. What he had said about discussing him with others was true and sane. She would pour out her energy and skill, all love-lighted, upon him. But she would never mention him again to anybody else.

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE OXENHAM ARMS a party of familiars drank on an evening in late spring, and each declared that he was overworked by the increasing demands of the time.

"As for me," said Neddy Knapman, "I haven't touched a fishing-rod for a month."

"And I'm never away from my bench," declared Jack Joep, "except when I run over here for two minutes at mid-day to see my daughter."

Emma herself was behind the bar and she did not contradict him.

"What about thicky widow we all know you'm hunting?" asked Knapman.

"Mustn't talk like that to my white beard," said Mr. Joep. "I ban't hunting—'tis only you hunt—other people's birds and fish."

Lucky Madders arrived. He declared himself overdone with toil like the rest.

"But then I've worked ever since I could walk," he said, "and work's my second nature."

"Have 'e seen the apple blooth in the valley, missis?" asked a labourer of Emma. "'Tis very purty I'm sure and did ought to stand for an amazin' good year of cider."

"No—too busy, Henry."

"As for the apples," said Mr. Joep, "'tis only a very hopeful sort of fool, Henry, as smacks his

lips at the sight of the blooth. Every flower ban't an apple no more than every egg's a chick; but we're past May and all's promising fair."

"St. Dunstan's Day be the ticklish moment, so my gran'faither used to tell," declared Lucky. "But times have changed since then and the seasons have shifted."

Then entered a rare visitor, though one familiar enough in time past amid these surroundings.

Miss Cann appeared, clad in a long black cloak which enlarged her shape to the form of a gigantic extinguisher.

"Where's my worthless nephew?" she said to the barmaid. But Emma she ignored explicitly.

The wife pretended, however, not to see this slight and answered the question.

"My husband's in Exeter on business. He'll be home to-morrow, Miss Cann."

Fanny hesitated. It was not her practice to be uncivil where women were concerned.

Mr. Joep spoke.

"'Tis a comely sight to see you under the old roof, Fanny Cann," he said.

"Is it? I'm doubtful if 'tis safe, however. There's none to look after anything now, and the old roof be like to fall on the top of all you idle toppers afore long; and good riddance if it do."

"We was all talking about our work, if you must know," declared Neddy Knapman.

"Yes—talking about it."

Miss Cann, who had not heard her own voice or another's for a week, now showed an inclination to stop, and Emma—always lightning quick to serve her husband and lacking not for intuition that Tom often called 'white magic,' now came

boldly from behind the bar with a glass of cordial. She got a cushion, drew an old chair to the fire and insisted upon her husband's aunt sitting down.

Fanny frowned, hesitated and was lost. The little woman rose on tip-toe and soon removed Miss Cann's great cloak.

"Tom have wished time and again that he could see you with your glass of his cherry-gin in your hand. He'll be terrible sorry to miss you. I'll mend the fire if you please. The evenings run chilly still and we light it, because my father here and another old man or two like it."

"Of course. I know 'em. What's this I hear tell about Mrs. Cottle, Jack Jope?"

"I can't say what you hear tell, Fanny Cann," he answered. "But if you've heard tell that she's very like to take me and go down the vale along with me, you've heard the truth."

"You'm always sticking up for women, and so you ought to praise shoemaker here for being so addicted to 'em," declared Neddy Knapman.

"In such a case as this, you couldn't offer 'em a greater insult," answered Fanny. "What be he offering but a barrel-load of a dead woman's children?"

Mr. Jope flushed a rosy red and his eyes flashed behind his glasses.

"There speaks a neuter I'm sadly afraid," he retorted. "Why—God Almighty—because a man's beard have turned white, be that any reason why his blood should run cold? I tell you, you unfinished creature, that love keeps the heart young."

"You're a very nasty old man in my judgement, whether I be unfinished or not; and come

Sally Cottle takes you, she'll be a loser," summed up the man-hater. Then she asked a question. "Why ban't the bear here? I miss his growl."

"Do 'e mean Pike or Dunning?" asked Lucky. "Bear' be far too meek a word for my master. A bear's a tame beast alongside him. And us shall all suffer mighty soon, or I'm no prophet."

"The quarry you mean?" asked the man called Henry.

"Yes, I do. I smell brimstone and sulphur there whichever way it goes."

"Your wages won't suffer," said Emma. "You and the other men will be left where they are."

"You can go if it comes to that," declared a miner.

"I can; but where to?"

"What does Trevail say?" asked Mr. Jope.

"Too busy to say much; he's trying to get by skill what Pike can't get by force; but 'tis all a question of cash. Mrs. Trevail—she'll oftentimes come in the quarry and mount the lime kiln and watch me at my work. She don't want 'Iron' Pike to have the quarry no more."

"That's silly of her," said Emma. "What's the good of her wishing things to fall different from how her husband wishes?"

"She have her reasons and very good ones," declared Miss Cann; "but even the best and most seeing of us, such as Lizzie Trevail, though she's on the right track, be on it from wrong motives. She won't be under her man's thumb; but she's trying to lift him up to her high opinions and can't believe me when I say 'tis wasted time her trying to."

"Don't you say that. She'm terrible fond of him and he's terrible fond of her. I've seen 'em

kiss like lovers in the quarry," declared Mr. Madders. "My eyes be sharper than anybody knows and I've got a long sight that will put to shame many a younger man still."

"She'll lift him if it may be done," said Mr. Joep. "A soaring woman no doubt."

"You can't soar—not with a wingless creature like a man tacked on to you," snapped Miss Cann.

"'Tis the thing we love best we understand best," ventured Emma. "With my Tom I never will ask him to soar, because it ban't his way. But I know him so well that I know just what he can do and what's within his power. I surprise him by telling him what he can do; I don't weary him by telling him what he can't."

"None knows what they can do till they try," admitted Fanny. "But every wife starts marriage with a false picture in her mind, and the ticklish time be when the false picture's found out and the true one takes its place. Then she sees how the love fooled her; and she comes down and down and down in her demands; till at last she's content if the creature keeps sober and faithful and fairly honest. 'Twill take centuries of battle before they'm got under. We shan't live to mark it; we shall never see them to heel and in their proper places; but every dog has his day, and ban't the bitches to have theirs?"

Before this attack the men fell off and dispersed. Soon not one was left, and then Fanny returned to a former and particular theme.

"It scatters 'em, like the chaff they are, to hear the truth," she declared. "But leave them for the moment and tell yonder woman to go out of the bar. I want to speak to you."

Emma bade the barmaid depart.

“When this here thing happened,” began Miss Cann, “my first thought was never to have nothing to do with you; but to-night I’ve changed my mind. I’m fond of Tom, not because he’s a man, but because he’s my nephew. Minnie had too lofty a touch. To Tom she was like the sunshine to an owl. You be quick-witted seemingly and you’ve said a thing or two that pleased me to-night. Guide him easy, but never let go. In the case of Lizzie Trevail and Charles you can see a bit how not to do it. In Lizzie’s case her many-sided nature be fighting against his narrow-mindedness and each thinks they be going to win. But so sure as death both will lose. I blush to say these things, for I ought to take a higher view and back Lizzie for all I’m worth. But there’s a cruel lot of difference between what’s right and what makes for happiness; and you—for all you’m only a chit and a scandal—have the common sense to see you can’t turn Jack o’ lantern into a star. You say you be going to surprise Tom by showing him what he can do. And that’s sense. Lizzie be mixing ‘can’t’ and ‘won’t’ in my opinion. Every wife’s sorrowful duty be to cut her coat according to her cloth.”

“And they didn’t ought to begin cutting too soon,” declared Emma. “’Tis no good dashing and slashing at a man and beginning to shape the material afore you know the size and quality.”

“Sense again. You know what you’m talking about. I don’t praise you for it, mind. These large-thinking women, like Tom’s first wife and Lizzie to North Combe, be far finer and grander than you; and their fineness and grandness shows itself when they be called to clash with men; but you’ve got what they have not—a seeing eye.

You can sum the men up better than they can. You be more alive to their narrow limits and mean needs. How do you hit it off with your mother-in-law? 'Tis to oblige her more than anything else that I came to-night."

"We get on very well indeed. Tom's face tells her all she wants to know."

Emma filled Miss Cann's glass again.

"'Tis closing time," she said. "Would you like for one of the men to see you up over?"

"No thank you," answered the elder. "I've got my stick and my lantern. When the time comes I've no doubt they will make my coffin and my grave and lower me into 'em; but that's all I shall ever ax of them."

CHAPTER XXVI

LIZZIE OFTEN ENJOYED to break from work for half an hour, stroll down to the quarry and climb to the mouth of the kilns. From here Tawton church, framed in trees, filled up the middle distance and above it Cosdon's arch completed the earth picture and spread in a right bow whose apex stood above the battlemented church tower. Hither she came with her thoughts on a day in late August, when the darkness of the foliage was as yet unbroken by any gleam of autumn. Above the world ranged mountains of golden cumuli sailing along the blue, and their shadows stained the Beacon's bosom with dim purple as they passed before a gentle western wind.

In a moment of weakness Trevail had hinted to his uncle of Elisabeth's attitude toward the quarry, and a period of tolerance was ended. Charlie mourned his confession too late and Pike raged.

The thing had happened three days before and a collision between the man and woman was inevitable. Trevail felt full of vain regrets and begged Lizzie to forgive him. But she did not blame him and made no effort to avoid the old man as her husband begged. He would seek her she knew, and she cared very little what might come of the collision. Her husband's attitude

to the quarry, the shifts that he had made to win it, the indignities to which he had submitted on his uncle's behalf—all tortured her. The general attitude of mankind to Trevail also tortured her. She loved him dearly still, but hope was dying. She began to know that it was beyond her power to be of any service to him. It remained also beyond her power to be neutral and watch him slink along the paths that his nature indicated. Yet his overmastering love for her seemed not to falter. He sank under her strenuous moods and bent to them as the twig to the storm, but he sprang upright again when, out of sheer weariness, she relaxed awhile. He tried to please her and she knew it; but his ingenuous attitude to the world, his lack of reticence, his love of the easy path and comfortable resting-place—these she could not change. Neither could she endure them.

Now the woman looked down from her perch and saw 'Iron' Pike below. He had marked her some time before and was hurrying towards her. She reflected, then left the top of the kiln and went into the valley to meet him.

"He might throw me over!" she thought, yet laughed at her thought.

"I want to speak to you," he shouted before they met.

"I know it," she answered. "I'm come to meet you."

"Just list to me, then. I've had enough of this. If you're going to play fast and loose with your husband and choose your friends from his enemies, 'tis time he tackled it."

"It would be, but you're talking nonsense."

"Don't you answer me. You listen and speak

after. You've always done all you could to come between me and my nephew ever since you took him; and 'tis time you stopped if you don't want your blasted neck wrung. How do you dare to side against him and me in this matter? You might just so soon be unfaithful to the man, and, for all I know, you are. But you've got to choose and that mighty quick between your friend and your husband now. The tenders go in next week and I've found out all about all of 'em but Dunning's. And I order you to find out his and report it to me afore Thursday night, or I'll cast you out. By God I'm in earnest! I can do it. And a damned good riddance too. Who be you to come between me and Charles Tревail? What be you to him compared to what I be? What are you good for but to weary and nag the fool's soul out of his body, and spoil his nights, and torment his days and turn the food sour on his stomach? Blast you! I'll hear no more on you. You find out, and damned quick, that you can't hunt with the hounds and run with the hare."

He stopped and Lizzie thought a moment before answering.

"'Tis hard to make you understand," she said, "because you're not a common sort of man and haven't got a common man's sense. Something's been left out when you were making—or else something was put in. But the very way you talk to a woman shows what you are. And I have tried to come between you and Charlie, and I always will try; because you can't teach Charlie the only thing you've got worth learning."

"What's that then?"

"Your power to work, and your hardness, and your scorn of all that's feeble and soft and

cringing. If you could teach him that I'd be glad enough; but what you do teach him is love of money, and that's poison to a man like him. It don't hurt you, because you're three parts a savage and you'd be just as happy to hoard beads or shells, if they was as hard to come by as money. You hoard for the sake of hoarding, and money don't make you soft and silly: it makes you hard and strong. But my husband's different from that and you know it. He can use money. He likes what money can do. He's always looking forward to ease and idleness and laziness—all to be bought with money. And that's why I try to make him change."

"What about Dunning then? Your smooth tongue won't explain that so easy."

"Your rough tongue don't. You've said things to-day that none but you, or a madman, would dare to say. Dunning is my friend, and a good friend, and a wise man. But as to his business, I know no more of it than I know of yours. And as to trying to learn ought of it—why, what do you take people to be? Because you're my husband's uncle, is that reason why I should try to steal Reynold's secrets about the quarry? To run your errands and plot to get secrets for you is none of my work. What do I care for the quarry? It only means money. I'm sick of the word, for it stands between my husband and every proper thought. If I was to ask Dunning for his tender, what would he say?"

"He'd tell you. He'd trust you."

"It isn't the tender," she said. "I know that much. He made no secret of that. It's what lies behind the tender. He understands something about the quarry you don't. It's the

knowledge behind the tender. The figures wouldn't help you. You can't go below a certain sum and still quarry at a profit."

"Now you're talking sense. We'll mince no words. The man loves you, or behaves as if he did. Well—there 'tis: you be the only creature on God's earth can get his secret out of him. Ask for it and let him make his price. What the devil do it matter? Give him what he wants, and I'll give you what you want—that's a bargain."

She was familiar with the crudity of Pike's mind and his proposition did not astonish or dismay her. She could discuss any subject without a blush when alone with him, as easily as she could disrobe in the presence of a cat or dog. He belonged to another order of beings and she always felt it. He was half child, half brute.

"A very good thought from your point of view, no doubt," she answered. "But there are pretty strong objections. First of all, Reynold Dunning doesn't want me any more than you do. But supposing he did; what about the payment? What payment could you make me if I told you his secret to-morrow?"

"I'd name you in my will. I'd give you whatever you asked for in reason."

"Would you give me Charlie?"

"Yes, and welcome. I'm so sick of Charlie as you are. He means well—he's done a good thing here and there for me; but he's failed over this. You succeed where he's failed and show me how I can work my quarry and cut out that chap and I'll give you—I'll give you——"

He broke off and she spoke.

"Don't tease your brains to think what you can easiest part with. 'Tis a thousand pities you're

not more like other people, for then you and me would have got on very well; but we never can now. I know how you feel to me—wicked—wicked. You'd like to tear my heart out. But I'm not afraid of you now, though once I was. You're only a sort of clever tiger—wonderful wits for a beast, but not enough for a man. I hate the way you look at things. I'm sorry for you—very near as sorry as I am for Charlie. But you're both past praying for. I'd have done great things for you both if I could; but I'm not clever enough for that. I can't do any good now. I can't make my Charlie see with my eyes. I can't make him—there, what's the use of talking?"

He stamped and swore.

"Never mind me or him. What'll you get Dunning's secret for?"

"I'd rather never see him again than do it. I don't care how soon he has the quarry."

He blinked at her like a wounded hawk.

"You blasted traitor! Then hear me. If he wins now, 'tis your fault—if he wins, 'tis because you've helped him to win; and so sure as that happens, you shall have your throat slit for it! God's my judge if I lose the quarry I'll—I'll—you and your leman shan't enjoy it anyhow—I know—I know how 'tis. I see at last. You've got my tender out of your husband—wormed it out of him—and took it to that dog! 'Tis hard to keep my fingers off your throat when I——"

"Ask Charlie if he has told me your tender, or if I ever asked to know it. Haven't you got a soul? Don't you believe in God? Can't you see where these rages will land you? You'd like to throw me down and trample me this moment; but why? What's the use? Think—think more!

If I can teach you nothing else, I can teach you that."

"Life's life and death's death," he said with strange quietness. "And when you be in the shadow of death, we'll see what you teach me then. Warn him—warn him if you value him—use your chattering tongue for a sensible purpose for once and warn him that if he takes my quarry away from me, he can go and dig your grave in it! No man shall steal my quarry and no woman shall help him to reap my harvest. For I'll reap them if they do—both of them—and God in heaven kill me with lightning as I stand afore you now if I'm making a vain boast. I'm calm—calm as yonder pool. Take heed to yourself then, for what I say is truth."

He left her a little impressed by his threats.

CHAPTER XXVII

CHARLES TREVAIL was not the man to find any peaceful road through the coming crises of his life. He recognised a wide and deep obligation to his uncle; he loved his wife passionately; and between them now he began to suffer. Pike was consistent, Elisabeth was not. The man never bated from his fierce policy and Trevail knew how he would think and feel on every occasion; but with the woman he certainly could not reckon, because she could not certainly reckon with herself. She made concessions to-day and to-morrow withdrew them; to-day she yielded a point and admitted the necessity of relations with Pike; to-morrow she turned upon herself and scorned herself for weakness and condemned her own admission. Now she would be adamant and declare his soul's welfare and health demanded a complete upheaval and escape from local influences; and then, after he had gone in much trouble, and fought with himself, and considered her views, and debated on the future should he comply with them, she had yielded at sight of his woe-begone face and confessed that her ideas might be unreasonable. Thankfully then he returned to the present; and his renewed comfort at the respite only served to fire his wife

to fresh impatience and drive her to further efforts on his behalf.

The husband was weak, but he was not a fool, and he perceived the ethical significance of his wife's opinions far more clearly than she supposed. He knew that to separate himself from his uncle had been a course of double value; because it must relieve his spirit of an incubus and a degradation and it must serve mightily to increase Elisabeth's happiness. Against that, however, he set a duty owed to the old man. He thought much upon the difficulty and wondered whether he could serve Pike elsewhere as well as at North Combe. A factor that weighed far more heavily than his wife supposed was the elder's attitude to Lizzie. Under that Charles suffered indeed and it became daily a more serious tribulation. A point was reached when Pike refused ever again to break bread with his nephew's wife.

Trevail had called early at his uncle's house and the old man burst forth upon the matter.

"Don't let me see the torment no more or I'll do her an injury. You be daft on her and can't feel her beastly nature. My fingers twitch when I sight that woman! Damnation—I'll suffer no more of it, and if she was my wife I'd knock her on the head, like a troublesome cat, and put her in a sack and sink her in my pond some fine night with a hundredweight of limestone to keep her out of sight. You do that, and I'll help you; and then you'll have peace. A plotting devil—she's hatching God knows what against me with that anointed villain at Clannaboro'. Yes, she is; I'm never wrong and you needn't shake your head, because it's true. Choke the ginger-eyed hag! I'd——"

"Don't you take on. 'Tis the difference in your natures. She means well. She's got a peculiar mind. Women are unreasonable and never very sane where money's concerned. Either they undervalue it altogether and despise it, and all that; or else they sell their souls for it. Lizzie thinks I'm too fond of money."

"Can't the fretful, maddening fool see that——? Blast such creatures! Why the mischief, if you must have one, don't you get one without such a lot of beastly ideas? If they'd been left mindless and brains had run in the man mould only, 'twould be a better world and a happier. They don't know the meaning of truth, and if they belong to a wretch, 'tis enough to make 'em scheme and plot to ruin him. There's not a cur dog but can teach them what they'd be better for knowing."

"You're too hard. She's right often enough. 'Tis I ban't worthy of her."

"Worthy of her! Damn her! 'Tis for you to be worthy of me, not her. Be rids of her afore she works more harm! Do what Tom Underhill done. To meddle—to pry—to lift her cursed voice in men's affairs—— And my quarry—my quarry—why, how the devil I've suffered it I don't know. I'd like to chain her in the midst and fire a ton of dynamite under her feet; I'd like to throw her in the kiln and let her roast a bit till she shrieked for mercy; I'd like to stone her to pulp and feed my fishes with her."

He tramped up and down his kitchen, flung his arms about him, stamped with his feet, showed his teeth and snapped them like a trap. His nephew strove to allay this wrath but Pike bade him be silent.

"Not a word for her—not a word! You know I'm right; you know she's a snake and have bit the hand that have fed her. A birthday present I gave the wretch; and now she's scheming with her lover to get the quarry."

"Uncle! you shan't say these things to me. I can't bear no more."

"'Bear'!—you'll bear till your back breaks. You've only just begun to know what she is. And may God judge me if I lose the quarry, I'll——"

"You won't lose the quarry."

"If I do, 'tis her work and you'll be called to choose between us. You'll be called to choose, and if you cling to her, you may go with her and live in hell for the rest of your fool's days. And if you throw her off and spurn her, then I'll show you 'tis true what you've told me oft enough—that I be your first friend. We was all right afore this gnat stung you; and we'll be all right again. But she's death and damnation both, and you'll never draw a quiet breath so long as you knuckle under to her."

"You're not yourself to-day. This business is unsettling you. The tenders all go in next week and we shall know before Michaelmas."

"Wouldn't give up his secret, though I'll swear she knows it. Wants him to have it, I tell you; and then, so like as not, if you don't throw her off, she'll do the same for you, and run to that devil and laugh at you. If you was a man, or half a man, you'd take a man's care that the laugh should be o' your side, not hers. Kick her out of your house and tell her to go to him and ruin him body and soul. Kick the whore to him, and then, so like as not, she'll

begin plotting against him and torturing him and making his life a plague. He's always hungered for her—let him have her."

Trevail perceived the helplessness of argument against this whirlwind. Pike went out presently, while his nephew returned home. There was an idea in his mind to approach Dunning on the subject of the quarry and try if diplomacy might still conquer. But he was not sanguine. He dismissed the idea for the moment and thought deeply upon his wife as he returned to her. His uncle's savagery and brutality defeated their own object, and he smarted to think of the fearful things he had been called upon to hear. That Pike was not as other men, he knew; but never until now had he heard him pour out such vile invective upon any woman. He was angry and sore at the indecency. He felt that he owed his wife amends, though she had not heard the scene. He approached her in sympathy, but she, knowing nothing that was in his mind, happened not to be in a sympathetic spirit.

"I've been with uncle," he said, "and I'm afraid we're going to have trouble before long."

"What else do we have?" she asked.

"Well, it's no good pretending this can go on, Lizzie. You and him—you know. He's been in one of his mad fits to-day."

"He's always mad. If I could only make you see that——"

"He seems so to you, because you're so sane."

"Not always—not lately. But I'm saner than him and so are you."

"I've got unsettling ideas in me to-day. I want you to comfort me a bit, Lizzie."

She sighed.

"Wish I could. It isn't for want of trying that I fail."

"You can and you always do. D'you know what he said to me an hour ago?"

She shook her head listlessly. She was weary of life at this time and consciousness of failure had hung like a fog thick upon her for many days.

"'Tisn't often you come to me for sympathy from him. Generally the other way about: you go to him from me—to learn how to manage me, I suppose."

"Don't talk like that. He said just now that I'd pretty soon have to choose between him and you—a bit of a startler, eh?"

"He saw that?"

"He put it so. And sometimes in a downcast way, like now, I am half inclined to think he's right. But then I come to you, for you know that's nonsense."

"I know how you'd choose if you had to."

"I should hope you do, Lizzie. I should feel 'twas the beginning of the end with a vengeance if you didn't. But of course it's all part of his madness, talking like that."

"You calmed him down no doubt and told him—what? That he was more to you than anything else in the world; and that you'd see that I behaved better and didn't cross him."

"Don't talk so. I'm weak and feeble and all else you think me; but I respect you and respect your name and take good care that others shall respect it. If you'd heard me speak to him—but you're always doubtful of my powers."

"I'm doubtful of my powers, not yours. I thought I had more power, that's all. You're much more powerful than I thought you were."

"We won't drag over the old ground again," he said. "I'm idle to-day. Will you come for a long walk? We'll go up on Cosdon."

"I can't. I'm busy."

"Do come, Lizzie."

"It isn't possible now. If you'd asked me sooner."

"I can't do right to-day."

She was angry—with the stupid, unreasoning, causeless anger that overtakes every human soul sometimes. She knew it; and she was angry with herself for being angry. But the poison had to flow.

"You're always right in your own eyes and you reproach me every hour of the day for thinking differently. I'm a ceaseless grievance—that's what I am. I'm a grievance all the time, because I try to be a help and work my fingers to the bone and fret my hair grey for you. And I can't stand it much longer. I'll give you one more bit of advice and only one; and that is to decide which side your bread is buttered on. I'm not going to give way to that evil old ruffian for you or anybody; but if you are going to, then do it and have done with it. He's right for once: it *will* be me or him before long, and the sooner you settle which, the better for your peace of mind. Only take care that you don't land yourself where the likes of you always land yourself sooner or late, and fall to the ground between two stools."

He had seldom seen her so angry or with such little reason. He stared at her and she passed him and left him staring. There was a coarse grain in her temper that he had never known until now. He felt that something had demoralised her; he knew, despite her hail of words, that

she was angrier with herself than with him. He tuned himself to patience—not a high or noble resignation; only the mean patience of a lowly creature. He did not follow her but stuck to his purpose and went out alone. Some whim made him persist in the idea of visiting Cosdon; and he did so. He roamed the familiar spots sacred to his romance and his mind traversed many moods. Now he burned with love for Lizzie; now he resented her unkindness; now he felt gratitude to Pike; now he became deeply incensed when he reflected on the recent conversation with him. He told himself that there was much to be said on both sides and that both the old man and his wife were right in a measure. But what must be his course between them? He began to be very sorry for himself. Then he adopted a more masculine attitude and told himself that it should be within his tact and skill to reconcile these opposites and establish peace between them. Hours of futile thought passed over him. He suffered and the character of his reflections was not sanguine. A ray lighted the cloud from time to time, but it swiftly vanished. He loved his wife fondly, and the balance, as he turned homeward, belonged to her. If, indeed, it became a question of choice between the man and the woman, he could not conceive of himself as hesitating. But now he declared that no such last resort need be apprehended. For the moment the problem of Abraham Pike appeared more pressing than any other. If he lost the quarry, his nephew knew not what might happen, and he felt that now, while yet a little time remained, no trouble would be too great to retain the property in his uncle's hands. Lizzie could

wait. She was tacitly against her own in this question, and the less that the matter came to her ear the better. The thought angered him against her again. He was plucking some spikes of bog-myrtle to carry to her when he remembered it, and he hesitated in doubt whether to fling them away. His unstable mind was framed on this pattern: one thought thus for ever confounded another. It was the commonest circumstance with him to let a chance act of memory interfere with deeds to be executed, or in actual process of execution.

But he kept the bog-myrtle, and, as he descended the hill towards evening, there came a sunset glow that touched him to sentimentality and moved him to emotions, not maudlin but not manly. He decided henceforth to throw in his lot with Lizzie and set her above all other temporal interests. He saw that her prophecy might actually come true if he was not careful. He felt frightened for himself and returned home weary and dispirited, but affirmed to stand by his wife come what might, after the destination of the quarry was determined.

A very penitent woman welcomed him and fondled him into renewed cheerfulness.

Lizzie wept when he returned with his bunch of bog-myrtle. She heaped all manner of reproaches on herself and declared that until they had walked together again on Cosdon and sat together in the cairn crown of it, she would not have another happy moment. They planned a journey thither before they slept.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CHARLES TREVAIL went to see Dunning at Clannaboro'. He came by appointment, but knew that his mission was vain before he started. Yet, in his battle for Abraham Pike, no chance of success however slight was overlooked, and if uncertainty of decision marked most of his life's relations, it could not be brought against him that he had left one stone unturned to assist his uncle in the matter of the quarry. Elisabeth had not failed to mark this sustained effort, and the resolute endeavour that had led Trevail to make such immense sacrifices of time and energy impressed her.

Dunning was at the gate of his farm when Trevail arrived, and suggested that they should sit in the garden. He was taciturn and listened without interruption while the other spoke.

"I suppose I oughtn't to have come on this errand, but you know the last effort may sometimes save a cause. It's the quarry. I want to speak to you afore the tenders go in. I want to ask you if by any power of mine I can make you see different. Of course I'm interested for my uncle. You know what that place is to him. It's his life in a sort of way. Nothing else matters in his mind beside the quarry. But you—you have such a lot of interests. You're

younger and cleverer than him. He's getting old, too. He'll drop out afore long anyway, and if you could but see your way to meet him there—— And for my part I should feel under a great debt, Dunning."

Treavail ceased, but the other made no answer.

Presently the younger proceeded.

"Of course I know it looks absurd," he said; "but the absurd things often happen. I'm not asking you to hold back for nothing. I can promise that we should make pretty substantial concessions and never again come between you and anything you were set on in any other quarter. He knows very well that you and he are the only ones that count in this matter."

"How does he know that?" asked Dunning.

"Because he knows you. He knows that if you had not been pretty sure of yourself, you wouldn't have tendered for the quarry."

"What's he frightened of?"

"He's frightened of your tender. He guesses that you've sent in a lower tender than his, for the sake of getting him out."

"He thinks I'd lose on a tender—just to spite him?"

"He thinks you might do that."

"You're lying," said Dunning bluntly. "Pike never thought I'd lose money for the pleasure of seeing him smart. I care no more whether he smarts than whether the worm smarts when I put my spade into the ground, or whether you smart to hear me now. You're lying—'tis your thought, not his, that I'm tendering for the quarry to spite him. You may so soon say I tendered for your wife to spite you. I offer for the quarry because I want it, and I probably

offer more for it than Pike, because I know how to make it pay better than he does. As for you, you're a fool to know me all these years and not to know me better."

"I came for friendship to my uncle. He doesn't know I'm here. It seemed to me a hard thing that he should lose the quarry, and so I strained a point to help him keep it. But you're right: I might have known that you would hardly see that it was a fine deed to yield. Might's right with you always."

"But not with Pike—eh? Such a kindly old man, isn't he? Always stretching out his hands to do the people a good turn. Just the man that any decent person would be proud to sacrifice himself for—eh? Tell him when I have the quarry, he can come and work in it for me if he pleases. And now you'd best be gone."

Trevail was angry.

"Civility costs nought," he said, "else I wouldn't urge it upon you; but a civil tongue you might keep in your teeth for me. I've as much right to work for my uncle as you have to work against him. And since I can't avail him, I'll speak for myself, though I hadn't meant to do that. I'm not afeared that you can do my wife any harm by your talk, but I know, to my cost, that it don't do her any good; and when you next meet, I'll thank you to remember she's a Christian woman and the wife of a Christian man."

"That's better," answered the other. "Now you be saying something that interests me. Your wife is all right; but you'll have to change a lot if you think to keep her all right."

"You told her that, no doubt?"

"Not a chance! She told me. No news either. You would have liked for her to get my tender out of me, no doubt; and find out what I knew about the quarry that your old turtle-dove don't."

"She told you that!"

"Wrong again. But I know Pike and I know you. You're a fine pair. Brute strength and cleverness combined—hunting in a couple—and I snap my fingers at the both of you; because I'm stronger than him and cleverer than you."

Trevail considered and then spoke.

"You mustn't talk like that."

"That I should correct a husband in his view of his wife! A funny world, by God! But there 'tis: Mrs. Trevail's no traitor. She'd so soon have told me Pike's tender as told you mine. I rate her higher than you do. I told her my tender, and you can stop on your knees after you say your prayers to-night and pray to her to tell you what it is. But she won't. You mustn't call her a traitor; because if you say that sort of thing, she'll damned soon chuck you."

The younger took this banter ill.

"If she's so blind to what is right as to listen to you, and let you ruin her faith in God, and in me, and in everything—then 'tis time her husband spoke. You're doing wrong and you know you are. If you know her well enough to tell her your secrets, then you know her better than you ought to, and, weak as you may think me, I'm not weak there. I've had enough of it and I've heard your opinions preached too often of late. Not that she comes back from you happy. She knows the stuff you tell be trash; but it unsettles her mind and makes my practical

way of looking at things seem dull and silly. 'Tis very easy to talk wildly and wickedly, when you know that you've not got to pay the cost; 'tis very easy to poison a mind, when you know that you'll not have to purify it again. I order you to let my wife be, and forbid you to see her any more. And when I get home, I'll tell her so."

"I shouldn't do that. We must give and take. She wants to be free, and she wants to see you free. If she told you never to have no more truck with Pike on pain of her displeasure, what would you do?"

"The cases aren't the same."

"Nearer than you might guess. 'Tis her soul you're bothering over seemingly. You think I shall spoil it. And 'tis your soul she's sighing for. Thinks that your old uncle be spoiling it. So if you distrust me, she distrusts him. That's a good friendly hint—eh?"

"I'll hear no more of this! Do I want you to teach me my duty—and to my wife of all people? It's outrageous and indecent, and I've had enough, and I order you never to speak to her again!"

Dunning laughed.

"An order's an order no doubt; but you can't order me not to see your wife any more than you can order me not to win the quarry. If I'd ordered you not to marry Mrs. Trevail a bit ago, you would have thought I was gone in my head. No, no; you mustn't order people. You must leave that to your old man. Don't you order people; you obey them. And here's another tip, since I'm feeling in a kindly mood. Lizzie don't hate your uncle because he's your uncle: she hates him because he makes you look such a poor thing. If you fought him and beat him, she'd

put a crown on your head and go an inch higher herself. But you can't do that. If you was to knock me on the head this minute, she'd say her prayers to you for evermore. But, again, you can't do that. Yet, what a fine stroke 'twould be—eh? I drop and you tell her. Then she suddenly finds out that she's married a man after all; and Pike gets the quarry. Think of it! 'Tis worth the pains."

"You're a mocking, evil devil, and I'll waste no more of my time on you. But keep far from my wife and don't see her no more, else I may take you at your word and surprise you. None loves peace better than I do; but I mean peace, not a fancied pretence of it. I've spoke, and I look to you to heed me. Life is a difficult matter, Dunning; but we needn't make it more difficult than it is—for ourselves or our neighbours. I've told you what I wish, and there can be no honest reason why you shouldn't fall in with my wish."

"What if to fall in with your wish be to fall out with your wife?"

The other leapt up in a fury.

"You're a damned scoundrel and I'm glad I know it. Now take heed where you stand, or it will be the worse for you! I'm a mild man, but when you do rouse a mild man, he's often the hardest to stop."

Trevail went off and the other watched him go. There was neither scorn nor concern upon his face. He entered his house a moment later and pursued the tenor of his thoughts in a question to Mrs. Vallance, who was laying the tea-table. She, however, spoke first.

"Ban't Mr. Trevail coming in to tea?"

"No, I've vexed him. Have 'e ever heard

what the cock-robin did when the weasel robbed his nest?"

She shook her head.

"Well, him and his wife raged something terrible and cried out that they'd have justice if heaven fell for it. And they planned to do such things against the weasel as would make the whole world shiver. And everybody waited in a cold sweat to see what they would do. And what was it, do you think?"

"What could they do?"

"Exactly so! They did what they could. And it was—nought."

CHAPTER XXIX

SHORT OF THE SUMMIT ITSELF Elisabeth's favourite haunt on Cosdon was a narrow cleft that fell westward between two high ridges of heath and stone. It carried a little stream to Taw river in the valley far beneath, and the beck wound and tumbled and sang beneath stout salallows dwarfed by the winds that rushed up the cleft like a chimney. The place was knee-deep in ling and fern, and the water ran beneath, peeped out in occasional pools, flashed now and then from tiny falls and showed a twinkling face before it vanished again to sing unseen. It was sheltered from east and north; but the west wind found it and the westering light before sunset time often warmed it with the delicious apricot glow—roseal, gentle and tender—that Lizzie best loved of all radiant things and called 'her light.'

But of late her fancies woven from the uplifted loneliness had suffered under fret of living. The strength and virtue, the magic and mystery of Cosdon dwindled in her heart and the dreaming times were fewer. She was becoming an unhappy woman and reality began to tumble down her airy castles.

Reality appeared now, for a man came to her at the tryst.

"I thought you was used to drink of this rill

and count it precious," he said. "You often told me that all the hill's virtue bubbled up with the stream; and you drank it in—like the wild savages think they drink a fallen enemy's strength and cunning with his blood."

She shook her head.

"The time's past for fancies and nonsense. There's things happening where the Beacon can't help me."

A bird was fluttering near them—restless and unhappy. Dunning looked about and presently called the woman's attention to what he found. Two tiny fledglings sat on a stone together and their colour was that of the mottled granite.

"They be young churn owls—come too late," he said. "The mother will never rear 'em now."

"Let's go further off, so as the poor bird can bring food to them."

"'Tis no use. 'Twould be kinder to crush 'em and have done."

They moved, however, and Lizzie watched the parent return.

"Nature's full of things like that," said Dunning. "Countless—countless the cruel blunders she makes—in minds and bodies both. We all get under her wheel some time or other; and some she kills and some she maims; and her truest kindness is a swift death. 'Tis all I'd ever pray to her for."

"You can always see the dark side," she said. "You can always mark the last year's dead leaves, but never the spring flowers. You see the battle under every leaf and in every breast. Have you never had a joy?"

"Not yet; but I'm hopeful still."

She sighed.

"I didn't understand you once; but I do now. We fool ourselves to think that happiness is a real state, for 'tis a fancied thing at best."

"Happiness is just possible, but, like all real good things, terrible hard to come at. You must fight for it; you must sweat and sting and bleed for it. You must be pretty strong to get it. The weak never can have it. 'Twas you showed me there could be such a thing as the joy of life. I didn't believe in it till I met you. You can't influence Charlie, but you can influence me. You can't make anything beautiful and fine out of putty, but you can out of stone."

She knew what he meant and she often thought of it now. It was true that she had influenced him. Her only joy lay in the knowledge. Some might have held it a dangerous joy. It had come as a revelation at first, but now she accepted the fact as her sole anchor to self-respect in the painful turmoil of life. She no longer felt any need to pour such ceaseless contempt upon her failure to justify existence, while a strong man thus loved her and bent to her. She had made Dunning finer than he was before she knew him. There was, however, reciprocity. He had tinged her hope with gloom and saddened it for ever; he had corrected her estimates and values; he had chastened her sanguine soul.

He found her depressed and out of tune now and he spoke to her bluntly.

"There was a fool once," he said,—“God knows who, but he ought to have been crucified for it, who told a lie about women; and it's made thousands of the silly things more miserable than any other man-made lie about 'em. They've believed it against their own hearts and their

foolish tears that have flowed over it. D'you know what it is?"

She shook her head.

"'Tis this: that a woman can love but once. The cant of it! Who denies a woman can love deeper than a man? And can't she love as wide? Love—love—'tis like the lightning. Be a place safe and proof for evermore because it have been struck once? A woman built to love will love, same as a bird built to sing will sing; and if the man that makes a girl's life good goes out of it from some cause or another—if his body dies or his soul rots, or what not—is that woman to love no more? Well I know it may be done—and so do you. A woman that stops loving a man for one cause or another be like a widow. For her the man's dead. But can death freeze love beyond the power of life to thaw? Charlie's dead, and well you know he's dead. Get away from him and let him come to life again in a gentler air than you cast around him. There—I've said enough. I'm dry."

She argued and held for a single heart. He marked an uncertainty foreign to her nature and not often revealed by her moods.

"Where have you been since last I saw you?" he asked.

"To church."

"Where!"

"To church, I tell you."

"Lord! Where'll you go next? I thought you had made Charlie understand you was done with that once for all."

"So I did; but he begged and I went."

"Did it pay for the trouble? I warrant not. It only blinds you to your fate; but it can't alter it."

It can't lift you above yourselves. What's the good of Charlie's prayers to him? They hurt and torment him—they can't change him. He knows that he ought to be stronger and surer, but he can't—he can't. And you know he can't. He can't rise above himself and he can't sink below himself either."

"How do we know what *is* himself? How do we know the highest in a man or woman's power to reach? Don't people surprise us every day?"

"The surprise is only because we were ignorant of them. Ask yourself how high Charlie can go, and don't fool yourself to think you don't know. You do know. You know you're too strong meat for him. You know a baby can't drink wine. And if you can't help the man, why hinder? And if you can't lift, why fling down? You're making him ill and out of hope. Leave him, for his own good, and come to me for mine. That's what you ought to do, if you're a sane woman, and a clean-minded woman, and have learned anything of the truth from this hill we're sitting on. Justify your days afore they are gone. Life's damnably short, remember."

She looked before her where sunshine soaked the Moor. His proposition did not startle her, for she had heard it before.

"'Tis your will and longing and ruling passion to uplift and help somebody," he continued. "Then come where you can do it. You be no sort of good to him; but to me—countless good—untold good——"

Still she was silent and he adopted a minatory tone.

"For God's sake don't mess and muddle and tinker with your short life; don't think you can do

for others what you can't do for yourself. Trying to make loaves afore you can make bread—that's what you are—trying to get a man in hand afore you've got yourself in hand. Oh, Lizzie, you're such a young thing to be trying to lead others. One failure—what's that? Who be there who hasn't failed oftener than once? Cut a loss and leave the man for his own good and begin again. Don't you stop with Charlie if you want him to be a happy man."

He harped on this last argument, feeling it to be his strongest; and the woman was weakened by it.

She declared presently that she was the first thought in Trevail's mind; but Dunning would not grant as much.

"He can't put you first, poor devil, no more than a sick man longing for ease can put his pain first and count it a good thing. You're his pain, and though he may know you mean his good, his real self screams out to be left alone. And it always will; and if you conquer and kill his real self, what have you done? Made a fine man? Not you. You've knocked the chance of happiness out of a weak one. 'Tis just trash for him to say he loves you better than his future prospects. How can a man love a woman better than his own highest ambitions and highest hope of good? He can't do it. Don't torture him more than you're bound to. Break the heart of the job merciful at one stroke—don't let him bleed to death."

"I love him, Reynold."

"If you didn't, you'd bide with him and let him go his way while you went yours; you'd share his cash and his luck and everything but his life. If you didn't love him, you could do all that without

a twinge. 'Tis because you do love him I'm at you to leave him. You oughtn't to love him. 'Tis wasting good stuff to love him. Jump in a dangerous river if the man drowning there be worth saving; but don't fling yourself in and risk your own life for nought. Not that Charlie's drowning. He can swim very well. 'Tis me that be drowning."

She was very silent, but he felt that he had gained ground. She marvelled at his speeches and perceived how much she had changed him. He appealed to her mightily since he had become humbler. But she knew that he was unchanged to everybody but herself. She found him the most satisfying element of life and did not pretend to deny it.

They moved presently and passed into the valley. Then they followed Taw, by many a glittering apron and singing fall, downward beneath the hills and the woods. September's robe had brushed the beeches now and dimmed them. As yet no flash of autumn fire broke over the forest at Cosdon's feet, but a dull, sere note was upon the trees and the setting sunshine found it and seemed to prophesy the more permanent light of the fall to come. The woods were aglint and aglow. The light laid little rosy touches on each spray and bough; it brought out the finials of the pine and feathered the horizontal arms of the birch with delicate fire. Where open spaces broke these hanging woods, the light burnt tenderly on dying fern, touched the granite ridges of the hills where they broke and swept upward, and lighted with a red flame the foliage of sister birches twined together upon a bluff.

The man and woman sat again beside the river

and watched light die. It seemed, as the day faded, that the water sang louder and louder.

For a long time no more speech passed between them. Then he uttered another warning suddenly.

“And remember this. He’s the strong one—not you. Your strength to be big is nothing against his strength to be little. He’s smothering all the heart out of you—he’s sucking up all your fine fire and not giving back one spark. And you’ll wither presently; you’ll get old afore your time, and wring your hands for sorrow that you was ever born.”

They sat on until dusk thickened and earth took on the vague vesture of twilight. Then they rose and went down, and he left her without farewell and she turned homeward.

CHAPTER XXX

BETWEEN THE VILLAGES of South Tawton and Zeal there stands the stump of an old wayside cross where three roads meet. Beside it is a barn, and here, by night, a man tramped restlessly up and down, like a tiger caged, and kept tryst with fierce impatience. The hunter's moon was in the sky and once or twice by the light of it the man stood still and scanned certain announcements in large letters that were pasted on the barn door. But he knew them by heart and had already attended more than one of the sales which they advertised.

Abraham Pike was waiting for his nephew, and the latter would meet him here presently with news from Oxenham House. The quarry tenders had been in a fortnight and information respecting them was promised for this day.

Pike's impatience increased and he strode up and down with shorter and shorter turns. He never wore a hat and his stiff, cropped hair bristled in the silver light.

Then came the quick step of Trevail.

"As you feared!" he shouted while yet forty yards away. "Dunning's got it!"

"What's the tender?"

"They wouldn't tell me. I pressed to know. I

only saw the bailiff. You was second, but a good bit higher than Dunning."

The other said nothing for some moments and then he burst into a storm of rage. He walked up and down irregularly panting and snorting. He lost self-control and cursed. For some time nothing but a lunatic frenzy held him and he howled and fought the air like a madman. He beat the hedge and the ground with his stick; then, coming beside the cross, he struck it savagely and the stout staff he carried broke in half.

Trevail walked up and down beside him, but made no attempt for some time to arrest his fury. He believed it would be better for the old man to wear himself out; but for half an hour his pent-up wrath blazed furiously; then, of a sudden, his temper began to sink. He was physically exhausted and his strides grew slower and his outburst more intermittent. He sat down presently on the cross stump and squatted there panting up at the moon.

Then Trevail began his soothing task and presently persuaded his uncle to rise and turn to the village.

"This don't end here," said Pike at last. "I'm not to be flung aside like a broken pot. No man shall have the quarry as long as I want it, and if 'tis denied to me, then I'll deny it to all others. I'll blow all to hell, and what I can't fire, I'll drown. I know the secrets of the place. I'll ope the well-springs, I'll plague this devil who has stole it from me and break his heart."

"He'll very like ruin himself without any help from you. Let him go—he can't cut you down and make a profit. He'll have had enough of it

in a year and cry out to you to take the lease off his shoulders."

"Ruin—ruin," cried the other. "Ruin shall be his portion, and all the sleepless, watchful strength in me, all the power to grind and throw down and crush in me—all—all I'll pour out against him. Better that he should cut his own throat than go on against me now. I'll tear him to pieces slowly; I'll batter and bruise him; I'll make him call on the hills to cover him."

"Much may happen before next autumn remember. You've got the quarry till next Michaelmas—a year you may say."

"And I'll pick the eyes out of it long afore that, and what I can't save, I'll spoil. He shall have nought for his pains—nought. I'll—I'll——"

He broke off and Trevail argued as best he could to lessen the blow.

"You'll have all the more time for other things. The quarry takes up too much of your thought, come to think of it, and if you put all the brain and trouble you've poured out there into cattle, or houses, or what not, you'd double your money. Me and Lizzie was talking not a week ago touching that, and she held out for it with your gifts you might easily get more money than you do for your lime and stone."

"Because she knows what he knows. Ban't they thick as thieves? Don't she take all your secrets and mine to him? Can't I read men and women? If she'd been our side in this—why, with her cleverness—she'd have got his secret as easy as Delilah got the strong man's. She'd have found out what he knows—she'd have brought his trap to us and we'd have caught him in it. But all's one now. The cat be on his

side, not ours, and if you cleave to her worthless carcase, you shall go down with 'em."

"You'll drive me mad," cried the younger. "You know how I've worked to stave this off; and now you say—you say—and, coming from any but you, I'd not stand it."

"Could she have got his secret or couldn't she?"

"I'll swear she never asked him for it."

"Bah! Be you so cold? Don't you know what you felt when you got the woman? Can't you see what that damned man feels now he knows the creature's a failure as a wife and may be in his claws yet? He wants her far more than he wants the quarry, and if it had been her or the quarry, he'd have left the quarry alone. 'Twas one of them cases where a female may get on the blind side of a strong man and make him harmless. She could have twisted him round her finger if——"

"I'll not hear this. You're out of your senses to talk to me so. What have I done to be——?"

"Get gone!" said the miser. "You're a whining whelp at best and the little use you ever was——" he broke off. "No, I won't say that. You're all right. You wouldn't have married that bit of foreign rag if it hadn't been for me. We hunt together, but we've lost our game too often since you took that vixen into partnership. She's got to go; and if I was you I'd sweep her to the devil, her master, and not let my honour hang on a hair of her head, same as it do now. She could have helped you and didn't; she could have give me my quarry and didn't—ban't that enough? She's a traitor by your own hearth—a liar and traitor. She'll be fathering another man's

brats on you afore you can look round. Be rid of her while there's time. Bid her begone, and if she won't go, then hurl her out. Give the woman her proper deserts. Haven't she robbed my pocket and stood between me and what would have been mine?"

Pike poured his venom on Trevail's wife and ordered the other to stop and listen, but at his own door he dismissed his nephew.

"Go now," he said. "I've got to think to-night. God don't forgive His enemies and more won't I. There's work ahead of me, and if that woman gets in the way, as I hope she will, then she'll go down with him. Greedy as the grave I be for the pair of 'em! I shan't hit for the minute; but when I do, 'twill be but once. No second blow will I give, because no second blow will be wanted. I'll keep to myself for a week now and see how it looks then."

He banged his door in Trevail's face and the younger man went slowly home. He had listened long and said but little; but now it was his turn to talk and he entered upon a tirade. He blamed Lizzie for no actual sin of commission; but he reported many of the things that Abraham Pike had said and he censured her that it should have become possible even for such a spirit as his uncle to speak so. She attended to his words patiently, made few efforts to excuse or explain herself and angered him the more by her apathy before the attack. She was concerned to hear who had won the tender.

"'Tis the 'overhang,'" she said. "You'll find that Reynold have thought out a plan to clear it off far, far cheaper than your uncle or anybody else knows how."

"Yes; and if you'd been a woman worth your salt and true to us, Lizzie, you'd have——"

"Don't tell me that again," she interrupted. "If you knew how it stabbed me—to think that you can even feel such a thing. It's dreadful enough in your uncle, but you—is that all your church-going does for you, Charlie?"

"You don't understand, because you won't. I never stood in your light. I never much minded your going to see Dunning in the past, though I've felt it wasn't no great compliment to me. But since you did choose to make him a friend, then surely to God you might have used his friendship to help those who are more to you than friends? What does Dunning care for the quarry—or anything in particular? If you'd wanted to do it, for my sake, you could have choked him off the quarry altogether, as easily as putting your hand in your pocket. And you know it too."

"Even that's a base thing to say. But you put it a bit higher than what your uncle does. You thought of that, not he. I'm sorry—I'm sorry about it all. But friendship isn't a thing to use for your own ends surely? You oughtn't to try to draw me in."

"Oh, my God!" he burst out. "Worse and worse it gets—nothing but sighs and wranglings and misery. What's the good of it, or the sense of it?"

"No good—no good for either of us, Charlie. The old look in your face is gone—driven away—stamped out by me. You're puzzled—stupid—like a dog at a cross roads. You'll do well to cut a loss—'cut a loss' is a very good word. That's how it is. You take your liberty and do

what you please. It's all I've got left to offer."

He grew angry.

"It's come to that—eh? And you can sit there and say that! You—that promised such eternal love as never a woman promised a man before in this world! Take my liberty and give you yours of course—to run to that godless—— Like to like 'twill be then—stone to stone—— What is it—what is it in me that brings out nought but the worst in you? How have I changed? I'm not a feather in a gale of wind for any fool's breath to puff this way or that. I don't go wasting my time, God knows where, listening to other women and then coming to you with their tales. How would you face that! I'll choose then, since it's got to be and you've made up your mind to drive me out of your life. I'll go to my uncle, and throw in my lot with him, and believe him, and curse the day when ever we met—curse it for your sake more than mine."

He broke off and waited for her to speak, but she was silent. She began to weep; and then followed the usual pitiful business of comfortable words and regrets from him and assurances that he had not meant what he said and so forth. Both felt the futility and the unreality of the reconciliation; but they pretended otherwise, effected a complete agreement and assured themselves, until long after midnight, that no such dark hour should ever come between them any more. Neither perceived the radical changes that had rendered such collisions possible; neither looked back and appreciated the crises that preceded their growing divergence. They reiterated the fond assurance that they were

heart to heart again and both believed it, before, wearied in mind and body, they fell asleep together.

They had blunted their emotions on one another so often that the business began to grow mechanical; and it was the more cruel for that. The very fineness of their quarrels perished and they were reduced to mean wranglings that followed an inevitable path through unchanging scenery and storm. Their differences ground away their nervous energy and threatened swiftly to spoil their lives.

CHAPTER XXXI

NOW DID ELISABETH and her husband strive honestly to come closer, and sometimes it seemed that they succeeded. Then, clouds separated them and they felt that barriers insuperable had risen between. To-day he yielded; to-morrow she did; but upon the reconciliation and glad embrace, like a mist over the Moor, like a forgotten sorrow revived, like the stealthy, steady oncoming of disease, the disseverance set in again. Trevail gradually perceived that things aforesaid spoken in heat and afterwards laughed aside were now true. They had become trite, and the bitter speeches now held ridiculous when reconciliation began were worse than the worst thoughts and utterances of a year ago. He had reached the cross roads and knew that he must choose his way or be driven upon it.

There came a storm and he left her and went out alone to the high ground. The Beacon attracted him of late, but it did not call her. He had noted that for many weeks she had not sought it. The Beacon was never on her lips. When they went out together, she did not lift her eyes to it mechanically as of old.

The man set forth on this day to face life as he had never faced it. He welcomed the

discomfort of the time. The east wind, the steep wet road and the cheerless desolation above were a fit theatre for his task. He climbed till the last roof-trees of Zeal had vanished from beneath and he stood alone. Cosdon had not yet donned her winter coat, but the waste rolled in lead-coloured planes sullenly, and round about the tors thrust black and ragged from a welter of driving cloud. The air was cold and raw with shed rain. There was no light on earth, save where a river wound beneath, ashy against its banks of darkness. The secret of the hour was a stern, uncomplaining and silent surrender to death. The wind whimpered and stung Trevail as he walked forward. He did not stop at Cosdon but breasted it, sank down on the other side and held on, until he came to Steeperton's crown, high lifted above the mist-laden plains of Taw.

Here he fought.

Before the added darkness told that day was fading, he started homewards and had reached the familiar slopes of the Beacon once again ere it was night. The wind had backed to south-east and rain fell heavily. Below him, through the wet air, twinkled out Zeal's constellation of earth-born stars, and beyond them he knew that the windows of North Combe were flinging light to the darkness. From the hill to the valley he descended and brought with him a final determination. He had made his choice and hastened to declare it. There was much to be done and he did not mean to sleep until he had done it. He hesitated in Zeal and even stood a moment at the gate of his uncle's dwelling; but he was wet and very weary. He determined to go home, don dry clothes, eat and then act. He returned, there-

fore, fortified himself and rested until it was nine o'clock. He was kind to Elisabeth, but met her tearful regrets at the morning tribulation with few words. He was at peace; but a sort of stoic hardness marked him. He imparted no information respecting his day and asked for none concerning hers. Her intuition told her that something had happened, but she did not speak of personal concerns until after they had supped. Then she came to him and sat near him while he smoked and looked into the fire.

Still he said nothing, though she waited for him to do so. At last her patience failed her.

"This can't go on, Charlie," she said.

"No," he answered. "I've found that out at last, my dear. And it's not going on."

She looked a question; but he did not see it for his eyes were still on the fire.

"How oft have I told you that your happiness is more to me than anything on God's earth?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, I know that. Nobody's to blame."

"Well, I should be to blame if I talked more and did nought. I've tried everything but one thing, Lizzie, and now I'll try that. 'Tis not much use saying I love you if I leave one stone unturned to show it. There's one stone unturned and I'll turn it to-night."

"You've done everything in your power."

"Very near—not quite."

"The fault's all mine."

"Not that neither. I've thought to-day, and I've seen a thing or two. I've frozen and sweated and toiled and panted to-day. I've taken a lot of your favourite physic up over—on the hill. Life's short and 'tis no good ruining your own and

another's too. We be both pretty young yet. 'Tis a pity to grow old so much quicker than we need."

He rose and went into the scullery for his boots. Then he came back to the kitchen and began leisurely to put them on again.

"Where are you going?" she asked. "Surely you've been out enough to-day?"

"I'm going to my uncle."

She was silent. His voice had something in it that struck unfamiliar upon her ear and sense. It rang firm and definite. There was almost a knell in it. She mourned and yet rejoiced. Was he on the point of decision? Had Cosdon found even some splinter of iron in him?

"For your own happiness you've decided then," she answered.

"How you read me! Yes, Lizzie, for my happiness—and yours, I hope."

"You won't change again?"

"You do well to be doubtful," he said bitterly. "A poor thing am I—between him and you. But even I can——"

He broke off and sought his hat.

She believed that he was gone indeed, and she told herself that she felt very thankful he was gone. Then her heart sank and the world shook.

"It will be better for both of us," she declared in a feeble voice.

"I hope so. Get me my coat, there's a dear—the best one. T'other's wet."

She went upstairs and fetched him a coat. He was looking out of the window when she returned.

"'Tis fine and starry now," he said. "I shan't be very long."

She helped him into his coat but did not speak. His face was set and firm.

He thanked her and went to the door; then he turned and saw that she had sunk down by the table with her face hidden. He came back and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Best you go to bed and don't worry either on your own account or for me," he said kindly.

"Don't go, Charlie."

"Yes, I must go."

He went and of intention left her in deadly doubt. His magnanimity and love had done mighty things with him on this day; but the small cruelty of leaving her thus uncertain for a time he deliberately perpetrated. His motive was mixed. He told himself that the pending joy would be by so much the greater when he returned presently with his news; but he did not tell himself that a shadow of malice lurked in the act. He had suffered enormously that day. He had suffered in many directions and resented with exceeding bitterness the familiar fact that a man cannot have his cake and eat it too. He had kicked against the pricks; and though he was now tamed and affirmed to do what he must do in order to keep what he valued most in the world, yet his heels were raw. In the arcanum of his heart he still felt aggrieved that such unreasoning and unreasonable demands should have been made against his peace. It did not hurt him for the moment to know that Lizzie was in pain and doubt. Her doubt and pain were as nothing to what his had been, and they would not endure so long.

He left her now without more words and supposed that her state was one of suspense. He

had, however, created a very different impression, and when he was gone his wife's mind faced a certainty.

Her day had been one of much tribulation also. She had never wandered further from her husband in heart; she had never more thoroughly perceived the folly and cruelty of remaining with him. And now she gathered from his words that he had arrived at the same conclusion. All her toil for him had ended in this. He was lower than when she started to lift him. He would always be kind and just and generous; but it was to Abraham Pike that his small soul clung. They would plan her future together now; they would thrust her out of their lives with a portion of money; and then they would breathe again. She had herself thought upon going a thousand times; and now she found that, after all, her husband was about to be strong and perhaps hasten her on the road she herself had designed to take.

She grew hysterical, then battled with her soul. Her pride came to her aid; but it was transformed and vitiated by the agitated state of her brain. Terrific emotion stifled her and hustled her into action. Bitterly she resented any sort of initiative being taken against her. She flushed hot; she raged and clenched her fingers together; she could have torn her hair when she pictured Trevail returning with plans matured and propositions for her acceptance. They would talk her over—the man and the brute—and they would decide what she should be directed to do, where directed to live, how supported.

In half an hour from the time that her husband set out, Elisabeth had also gone into the night.

Behind her she left a letter for him and, in it, she enclosed her wedding-ring.

Light-headed she wandered under a sky blown clear by the night wind. She avoided the road on which Charles must return home and presently climbed a little way up Cosdon. Then she crept down again faint and sick. Storms raged through and through her. At the wicket of Fanny Cann's cottage she hesitated. But she passed it, went down to the Throwleigh road and set her face for Clannaboro'. Her mind was empty, listless and indifferent to every call of life or duty. Her solitary interest was to find whether she had strength left to get to Dunning or must sink beside the way.

CHAPTER XXXII

ELISABETH REACHED CLANNABORO' at last and did not stay at the door but entered, as one who possessed the right. She had not a thought of Noah Vallance or his wife and felt no surprise to find Dunning alone, though by an accident his housekeeper and head man were both away.

He was sitting by the fire smoking, and save for the firelight the room was in darkness. For a moment he did not recognise her, then her voice brought him to his feet.

"Hullo—you! This is a sporting hour to turn up! What the deuce have you come for now?"

"To stop," she said.

"D'you mean it?"

She collapsed into the chair that he had risen from and sat there shivering.

"There's a bitter cold come over me," she said.

He lighted a candle and carried it and looked at her. He preserved an astounding coolness. Then she burst out into speech and he perceived that she was unhinged and distracted.

"Never, never again, so help me, God, will I thrust myself on any man's will. 'Tis all over. I'll go on my own way no more; I'll go yours; and when you're weary of me, I'll drown myself."

For answer he put his arms round her.

"Your way be mine," he said, "and mine be yours—you know that. But do you know yourself? Do you know exactly what you're doing? I don't want to take you unawares—unstrung—smarting from the folly of that fool. But once you come, you stop, and the devil and his angels won't get you away from me again."

He did not wait to hear her answer. He went to a cupboard and brought out a bottle. Then he sought elsewhere and found a green wine-glass. He half-filled the wine-glass with spirits and added water.

"Drink," he said. "I know you're coming to me; and I've known it for many a long day. But you shan't do anything in a moment of trouble, while your mind is weak and worn. You shan't do anything that you'll ever regret after for a moment. Drink. I wish you could drink away the past and come to me with your mind so empty as a baby's. 'Tis my turn now—'tis my turn to pay back a little of what I've had from you. You've made me—d'you know that, you wild creature? You've changed my life into a better life every way—every way—and if there is a God, let Him strike me dead if I ban't telling true. I'm a fit mate for you now if I wasn't before. And if I never saw you again, I'd still be the better for you. And remember I'm not the Trevail sort. I'm a cold man most times—I only burst out like a volcano off and on. I shall never be such a lover as him. But you know me—else you wouldn't be here I reckon."

He talked and she answered in brief single words. Then, as she grew calmer, he became grimly excited and began to measure all that this

must mean. He had expected it, but he had not expected it so soon.

"You're mistress here," he said. "For evermore. You'll never be tired of me, and if I found out that you were, 'tis I that would drown myself, not you. We make our own laws, you and me. We're one, and 'tis you that shall think and plan and I that shall carry out. Your good's my good henceforth, and if you can't face this hole and the people in it I'll up and away."

"I've chose you to follow, because you're strong and you love me and you won't drive me mad," she said. "And mind this: I shall never think unkindly of him. Never a man meant better. He couldn't help being what he was."

"He'll make a good bit of noise, I reckon; but the belving cow soonest forgets her calf. He'll find another woman on his own pattern. There's plenty of his sort everywhere."

Silence fell between them. Then he burst out into a loud triumph and worshipped her with such praise that she marvelled, never having guessed the possibility in him. His grimness died out of him. She could have wished that at this moment he had been more reserved, more saturnine and self-possessed. She desired to feel his strength and will.

He perceived this without any word from her. Her eyes told him. They were lovely in the candle light and lustrous with tears and wistful with doubt.

"Come to the table," he said, "and sit out of reach of me on t'other side of it and we'll talk business. Now, Lizzie, how d'you want it to be? I——"

They were interrupted. Unheard, some one

had approached over the grass of the garden and reached the house. Now there came a single knock upon the front door. Dunning leapt to his feet; Lizzie did not move.

"Is it him do you reckon?" he asked.

"Very like," she said.

He reflected a moment, then laughed.

"You chose the right night," he declared.

"My old folks are away at a funeral near Tavistock. We've got Clannaboro' to ourselves. Come!"

He pointed to the stone flight of stairs that led upward from the kitchen to his bedroom and opened the door that concealed it. Again a single knock fell on the door. There was something sinister about the sound to Elisabeth's ear. She put her hand on his arm, but he spoke and drove her thought out of her head.

"Go up—go up quick and make fast the door at the top of the stairs. I'll call you down in five minutes. It won't take longer."

"Be gentle—and be careful of yourself."

The knock sounded again.

He thrust the candle into her hand and pushed her toward the stairs. A moment later she heard him shut the door behind her. Then she ascended the steps, entered a room at the top and locked the door of it as he had directed. For a few moments she stood listening; but she could hear nothing.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WAR HAS BEEN CALLED the supreme test of humanity—the ultimate court of appeal that proves the worth of man. From that scorching ordeal at rare intervals he emerges deified; but such occasions seldom happen and the bulk of men may be satisfied if battle detracts nothing from them and leaves them still men, not slaves. War has been the first founder of states, the chaos on which every cosmos of social relations must be based. And war in some sort every human creature is still called upon to wage, unless contented from the outset with a slave's portion.

Charles Trevail, by accident of character and condition, was born a slave, nor could it ever have come within his power, under any environment, to be otherwise and stand four-square a man. Yet now he went to war; and he believed, rightly, that he had won a mighty victory over himself. He had done so, but he had won none over life. His fate was to choose a master: he had been called to no higher destiny than that. The battle—great for such a fighter—was fought on Cosdon, and what now awaited him did not by comparison seem a very serious matter to Trevail; but it became necessary to relate his victory and declare his determination to another; and he began to realise that all was not over yet.

The conclusion with himself must be only part of his total task and much remained to be done. The rest had looked easy seen far off, but now he stood at the threshold and found it hard. He began, indeed, to perceive that only half the battle was won and the foe now likely to be ranged against him might prove far more formidable than he himself, when ranged against himself, had proved. For he belonged to that sort of spirit who may, indeed, conquer self, but nothing else.

He came now to his uncle, and the accident of the moment caused his intention to prove even harder than he had expected.

Abraham Pike had taken his defeat badly and made no secret of the fact that he intended to be revenged on Dunning. He raved publicly against his victor and hesitated not to declare that he would ruin the quarry before his date of departure should come. His threats were futile; but Dunning knew that ferocity was a familiar weapon with the old man and he guessed that at this juncture his usual caution in sundry particulars might be over-ridden by sheer hunger for vengeance. It was typical of Pike's state that he could still speak and think of nothing but Dunning. He assumed that the listener in every case was similarly concerned.

"You're well come," said Trevail's uncle. "I want you. I've new ideas about this man. Nothing's done yet. We've tried fair means; now we'll try foul."

"Don't say things like that. What's the use? It isn't your way to waste your energy on a failure, or batter your hand at a locked door. The quarry's gone, and if you're wise you'll admit it and look round for other things. I've thought

this longful time that this stone pit was hardly worthy of you. 'Tis a rough-and-tumble job and you, with your brains and your money, ought to be doing something higher—in the way of mortgages, and all that. You ought to be working in figures and only figures. You're too big to go down into the dirt and fight such chaps as Dunning."

The other shook his head.

"No; I'll never be that sort. I like land and stone and heaps of muck and potatoes and corn and what not. Or beasts that you can punch and handle. I belong to the dirt, and I've made my pile out of it, and I'll not be driven away from it. What's the use of mortgages and such like to me? I want to feel and touch and smell the things that belong to me. I've got a plot. I——"

"Hear me," interrupted his nephew. "'Tisn't because you talk of tackling Dunning and want for me to help you, 'tisn't because of that, but because of many other things I've wound myself up to take a strong step next spring. You see, a married man can't live to himself alone, and he can't serve two masters. You know how 'tis with me better than I can tell you. You know my Lizzie. You and she are a bit too much alike and that's why you've never been friends and never will be; and I've got to feel that between you there's no middle course for me."

"So much the better. Get clear of her and you'll be useful again. She've ruined more of my schemes than I like to think about—damn her. I wish to God she'd took Dunning and not you. Then she'd have been under his feet, in her proper place, long afore now. But you—you're too

weak to kick her into sense; so 'tis better you be rid of her once for all."

"No, I can't do that. I've suffered a lot to see how ill she got on with you, because I was powerless to help it; but a wife's a wife; and that's what I know and you do not. I can't leave her. I must stick to her. I love her and she's a good woman and full of high opinions. I've not done anything in a hurry, I've thought long and deep, and I've come to see that it can't go on—for her peace or for yours. We must leave. I mean to go come Lady Day. From North Combe I go. And don't mistake my motives for doing such a big thing. I hope you'll look all round it, as your custom is, and see that only so can there be any peace for me or her. You must understand how greatly I love the woman, or else I shouldn't do it. But I put her first—always first henceforth—according to my duty, and I hope you'll feel I'm doing what's for the best."

Pike stared; then he gave off a loud guttural expiration, half a growl.

"You've bleated enough," he said. "Good God! Who d'you think I am? You—you to say you'll leave North Combe—you to turn on a man when he's down, and that man me! Must I jog your memory a bit? 'Tis master and man between us, I can tell you, since you seem to have forgot it. You give me notice—eh? You silly worm! 'Tis for me to give you notice when I please. You'd go from North Combe, would you? You'll go from North Combe when I tell you to go and not sooner. You want wakening—why—fire and hell! you'll call your soul your own next!"

He burst into a laugh, but Trevail perceived

the anxiety under it. And the evidence of that anxiety strengthened him.

"I know what I owe you and I'm not likely to forget it," he answered. "You are an amazing man—the most remarkable that I've ever seen or shall see—or any of us in these parts. And you've been a good uncle to me; and I've tried to be a good nephew to you; but you can't talk to me like this. You know it isn't proper. You take such Old Testament ideas in your head; but times are different and women are differently thought upon; and a man's wife isn't a chattel, but half himself and more—far more to me—than anything else can be."

"You set her up between us and think she'll shelter you from my anger."

"Don't show anger. What use have you got for anger—a wise man like you? Life's life, and none can have it all his own way. 'Tis giving and taking at best, and if you don't give, the world will look to it you don't take."

"A coward's motto; but you was always a coward and a cur to the marrow in your bones. You set up this curse made alive between us and pretend you must wreck your life for her; and think you can slink away and live in some hole with her and still have a conceit of yourself. You to go! Don't you see that you're the only thing on this earth built in my own image that I care about? Not another living man is there that I'd cross the way to save from death. I'm headed off here, and I'm headed off there, and I'm hatching hell for one or two that be laughing in their sleeves this moment; but you—you—you've been my right hand too long to part with me. Don't bring it to blows between us."

"As a man alone I was well pleased to be your right hand where I could, and do your pleasure; but I'm married now and I've got a good wife though you don't understand her, and she stands first—since it's come to be a doubt of what stands first. I'm sorry to God that the question ever had to rise and I've——"

"You put her higher than me?"

"Since it must be so, I do."

"Have you thought what it means to do it? Have you seen yourself limping along without me and nought but that nagging wretch to push behind?"

Trevail showed a flash of spirit.

"If anything could make me know I'm right, 'tis your bitter tongue. Yes, I've thought and thought again. And looking back, I'm amazed and ashamed—ashamed of myself—to think I could hesitate. I owe you a great deal——"

"And you shall pay it back. By God, to the last sixpence you shall!"

"I'll pay back all in power to pay back."

"There's nought in your power to pay back. While I live you owe me service, and if you take it from me the people will call you a thief to your dying day—a thief and a rogue. I've done far, far more for you than you can ever pay back—And if you go——"

He broke off and tramped up and down the room. Trevail found himself the strong and determined man. The experience gratified him.

"I shan't forget, and I shall have it in my power to do you many a service yet. I shall be useful to you and never be deaf to your call; but a man can't live for duty to the past alone. Duty's a thing of every day and comes fresh with every

morning and certain as the sun. I've got a great duty to my wife, and I see it clearer than ever I saw it before, and I'm going to do it, God helping, and I'm lifted up and strong to make her life a happier thing."

"'Tis all up with you if you turn on me. Leave me and I'll hunt you like a dog hunts a rabbit and——"

"Don't talk that way. Don't——"

But the elder roared him down.

"Get out of my sight, you thankless wretch, and see how 'tis between us when we meet again. I'll be revenged for this—such a vengeance as a brain like yours can't think. 'Tis all over with you and your hag now—both—both shall lie in the dirt! Everything's gone now."

"Listen and try to see——"

"Gall—gall! And I cared for you—I was gentle for you—and only for you. And if I'd been tiger to you, like the rest, and let you bide a workhouse boy, I should never have been deserted in my grey hairs."

Trevail rose.

"I've said enough for now. I don't want to be unkind or ungrateful or thankless. Far from that. I'm only going to the other side of the Moor. I'll be within call."

"Go as far as hell, you'll yet be in striking distance—near enough for me to hear you yelp when the lash comes down. Nothing left—nothing left now—d'you understand what that means? When your woman has run away from you, then you'll know what 'tis to have nothing left too. But don't you come creeping back to me then. Go out of that door and God's my judge I'll never let you in again—never."

The younger spoke a little longer and offered his hand, but Pike refused it and ordered him away. Finally Trevail went out and breathed the night air thankfully. His mind longed and panted for sympathy. He was hunger-starved for the sequel of this day and already pictured the price that Elisabeth would pay for his great renunciation. The worst was over now; she would be at his side for evermore; such battles as remained for them to fight must be fought together. And he felt also no little of the weak man's desire for praise. He yearned for it. He wanted much to hear his wife listen to what he was about to tell her. Already he saw the light of joy in her face—the glorious surprise at the thing he had done—the pride in him, the applause. He felt that only Elisabeth could round off and complete so terrific a day. For once he had moved among giant emotions and fought with lions and conquered them. He felt stronger than ever he had felt—drunk with strength. He was excited when he returned home; he seemed to be walking on air; he wondered at himself. Life appeared to be a changed thing. He looked at it for a moment through new spectacles; he felt just then that he had mastered it, that he had it by the throat; that the world was his. He examined his sensations curiously. He had experienced the like once or twice before—after taking too much to drink.

He gave Elisabeth all the credit and meant to do so when they met; but well he knew that she would refuse it and return it to him a thousandfold. Her praise was always splendid and limitless when she poured it out. She had lifted him to this, he assured himself, and knew not that for true, pure

love he had worked and that the impulse came from within himself alone. The greatest passion he had ever felt, perhaps the only great passion he was capable of feeling, centred in his worship of this woman; and through that channel, he had flowed out into the sea, had made her cause his own, her desire his desire, her welfare his welfare. This, while no mighty thing for love to accomplish in a larger nature, was a considerable feat for a man of his proportions. Trevail had not risen above himself, but he had ascended to the utmost limits of his stature and the loftiest possibilities of his soul.

He came home rejoicing, to find his house empty and a letter awaiting him. Elisabeth explained that their united life was killing them by inches and poisoning every possibility of clean and fine living for them both. They could not help each other; they would therefore be better apart for evermore. She had left him and never meant to return to him again. She knew that he had gone to his uncle and was sure he had done the wisest thing possible.

She wrote with a marked lack of self-restraint. The letter was blotted and wrongly spelled. She stated that she had gone to Dunning. She made no apology for the appalling suddenness of her act. Indeed she left it clear that in her opinion Trevail would not feel great surprise. To act, so she wrote, was her familiar part; and she knew that he would not be astonished that she had done so and thus forced him, for once, into a necessary activity.

It was half an hour after his wife had left North Combe when Trevail returned to it.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FOR TEN MINUTES Elisabeth sat on the only chair in Dunning's bedroom and waited until he should call her again. Her eyes looked inward and she ranged in thought over the past years. She examined her career from the outside and judged it impartially as the achievement of another. She mourned it, but she found no fault with it. That Trevail would quickly recover from the blow, she felt positive. She had been kind to him in leaving him and, after the first shock had swept over him, he would undoubtedly rejoice and breathe again. Already she felt herself breathing again. Dunning was the necessary complement to her own nature. He had often proved infinitely useful to her; and he had declared her value to him. Indeed, she knew, without any word from him, that she had influenced his life and been a valuable force in it. Her regard for him was fierce—akin to the affection of an artist for the last thing that he has made. She had time now to contrast her present and past emotions and wonder that loves could be so dissimilar.

Three parts of an hour sped and the woman came back to reality, speculated as to what manner of conversation was passing beneath her and marvelled that one so short of speech as

Dunning could, at this juncture of his life, spend so much time upon it.

She looked round the room and took note of implicit statement. Reynold Dunning seemed reflected in his sleeping place. The walls were whitewashed and the floor was bare. A narrow bed stood in one corner, a chest of drawers in another, a washing-stand in a third. Some boots and leggings were heaped beside the bed; the grate was empty, but on the mantel-shelf appeared a picture in a wooden frame. It was the portrait of the master's mother.

Elisabeth examined this faded photograph and found that it resembled the man with whom she had now thrown in her lot. Hence came his eyes and fine, melancholy cast of features.

She turned to the window, opened it and looked into the darkness. Unfamiliar outlines of tree and roof rose against the starry sky. "This is my home," she whispered to herself.

She sat down again presently; then, after waiting for another half-hour, opened the bedroom door and listened. No sound rose up the staircase and she descended gently to the door below. Still silence held the room and she perceived that Dunning and her visitor must have departed together. She opened the kitchen door to find the fire nearly out and the room empty. A clock ticked and she heard the cheerful chirrup of a house cricket from the hearth.

She stood and hesitated what to do. Then a whim took her to mend the fire, seek the larder, and prepare Dunning some supper against his return.

She approached the grate; but her foot caught in something stretched upon the ground and she

fell on to a man. He was half under the table and his head and shoulders thrust forth toward the fire.

She rose to find one of her hands wet and red. She knew not where to find a light, so went back to the bedroom and brought the candle down with her. Then she found that Reynold Dunning was lying by his hearth with much blood about the place where his head had fallen.

She held the light to his face and, though she had never seen a corpse in her life, understood well that she gazed upon one. His features were disfigured and painted with blood; his eyes and mouth were open. She knelt down beside Dunning, and spoke to him and kissed his forehead.

Then she rose from him and stood and wondered what she should do. The man's blood was upon her hands and her face. She forgot every living creature in the world and her heart poured out to this dead one. She was unshaken now and her mind had strung itself up to face Dunning's murder. "This is my home," she said aloud, as she had whispered it an hour before.

It seemed but a moment ago that this battered dust was a strong, joyous man, crowing with exultation—the goal of his hope in sight. Alive, his welfare must henceforth have been her own; dead, he was still a name to confess, justify and defend.

CHAPTER XXXV

ELISABETH TREVAIL, standing before the corpse, grappled with the tremendous problem before her and planned her actions. Pity actuated her, and first the flickering hope that, after all, Dunning might not be dead.

There was a doctor at Zeal, and she went to him and despatched him to Clannaboro'. Then she sought a nurse and returned with this woman to the farm. The doctor was already there and stopped for a short time with the women. He left presently and called at the police-station.

At dawn came Charles Trevail and spoke with his wife. He meant to see Dunning, not Lizzie, but met a policeman returning to Zeal from the farm and so heard what had happened. Thereupon he hastened thither and learned that his wife was sleeping in the parlour. The nurse had laid out Dunning and busied herself about the place until Mr. and Mrs. Vallance should return. A labourer was gone for the undertaker; and the police, who remained in authority, told Trevail that the inquest would probably take place on the morrow.

Charles then went into the dwelling-room and stood and looked at Lizzie, who slept heavily upon a sofa under the window. He woke her and they talked together for a long time.

She told him all that she knew and he received it calmly and believed her.

"I've heard you, Elisabeth," he said. "Now you must listen to me. I shouldn't trouble you with the past at a minute like this; but we may not have the chance to go into it again. And so far as I can see, it will be the past that they'll have to probe through and through before they get to the secret of this."

She looked at him in the gathering light; then she drew the blind up that she might see him better.

"We won't talk about ourselves more than we can help. They may think you did it after getting my letter; or they may think I did."

"Listen," he said. "When I tell you why I went to my uncle last night, you'll understand better. You thought I was going to throw you over, Lizzie. I knew you thought so, and like a fool—a fool always and for ever—I let you think so. I left you meaning to do one thing, but knowing you fancied I was going to do another. God can tell what whim made me leave you in doubt—or more like the devil. This is my work in a way. Even at the moment of doing the best and most decent deed I ever did, I let some small spite creep in; and so all's lost and we stand to each other as we stand now."

She stared at him in great horror. She spoke slowly after a silence.

"Yes, I thought you had chosen him. I didn't blame you. It was natural. Then I felt—I'm proud. I couldn't wait to be told to go, Charlie."

He rehearsed the scene with his uncle and she related it with the tragedy of the night.

When he had finished, she summed up.

"You were coming back to me?"

"'Twas to be the great moment of a great day."

Her mind trembled. Instinctively she gripped at the side of the sofa on which she sat and shut her eyes to avoid the whirling image of the man before her. He sat on a chair and looked straight into her face.

"You must think of me as having gone—long, long ago. Time's nothing. I stand here now as the widow of that slain man. He was good to me and understood me and loved me. Time's nothing I say. Though 'twas but last night I came, yet 'tis half a life-time——"

"We'll talk about you another day, Lizzie," he answered quietly. "You've done what you wanted to do, and I've done what I wanted to do. We've parted and can leave it so. You can tell me as much or as little as you please about your life with Dunning some other time if you want to. He's dead and you hold yourself his widow. Let it stand like that. And now what are you going to do about the man who killed him? You know how it fell out? 'Twas my uncle—driven frantic by me."

"He must have struck him down when his back was turned. I'd been with him not half an hour when somebody knocked. I suppose Reynold was getting drink for him. The cupboard door was open."

"You swear you know no more of it than that, Lizzie?"

"Yes, I do. I want you to tell nought but the stark truth when they come to question you. About how I'd left you and everything."

"If I do, they'll say that I might have killed the man myself."

"None that knows you would think so."

"The Law don't know me."

"Are you afraid of that happening?"

"No," he answered. "I'm afraid of nought. I've got nothing left to lose, so what should I be afraid of? My life ended last night. You hold me too cheap even now. I'm a stronger creature than you or I guessed. I found it out yesterday; and if I'd told you the instant moment I'd found it out, Dunning might be dead, same as he is now, but you'd be my wife to North Combe still, not his 'widow,' as you call yourself, now at Clannaboro'. Good God! what a thin thread the things that matter hang upon! Can't you see—can't you see?"

"I can see very well, Charlie."

"And I'd have confessed to you, and you'd have confessed to me—and——"

"I had nought to confess."

"You swear that, Lizzie?"

"You know me. Till I left you, I was faithful in word and deed."

"That's light—light in the darkness then."

"But not news—you knew that well enough."

He did not speak, and she, feeling a traitress to the dead, qualified her last speech.

"But I loved him—I loved him better than I loved you. I'd left you in heart long before I did it. I was all alone for ages of time before I turned to him. And he came to fill my empty, useless life and make it useful again. I won't excuse anything I thought or hoped. Nothing—nothing will I excuse. He was a good man, and he was honest to me and he warned

me a thousand times that I was ruining your life."

"Who made me do what I did? Who saved my life? Who made me choose to begin all over again—just with you and only you? Who lifted me to that, Lizzie? You know well enough. Be fair to the dead—I don't quarrel with you for that; but be just to the living too."

"'Tis too late to talk so. I know what's happened. And it's happened well for you, Charlie."

"You can say that!"

"And you'll say it presently. 'Twill help you to forgive. Leave it all—leave us—me and my dead. You have no place here."

"I'll go, but listen first. See how it fell out. Look all round it. I do a thing that drives my old man frantic, and he must be letting blood out of somebody. And naturally he strikes here—at his first enemy. If you'd been along with Dunning and Pike had found you together—he'd have killed you both."

She shook her head.

"No, he wouldn't," she answered. "If I'd known that it was Pike, I should not have gone up to the bedroom. Because I should have felt what was brewing and been able to save him. If your uncle had seen me here, he'd have been happy. And if he'd come in to kill us, he'd have gone away with the quarry—and you instead of murder. I thought 'twas you: that's why I hid myself. Do you understand how 'tis with me. I thought to save two men. Instead I've ruined two."

He did not speak and they pursued their thoughts.

After a considerable silence he told her that she might return to his home for the present if she cared to do so; but she refused.

"Only I know of your letter to me," he said.

"'Tis generous, but you must think of me as if he was alive."

"I can't do that."

"You shall, you shall," she cried passionately. "He *is* alive to me! 'Twill take cruel long days and months before I can think of him as dead. And for you—tell the truth and fear nothing. You've done right—you've risen above yourself and shown yourself a strong and a wise man. And you're well paid—well paid. There's two thorns out of your path at one stroke; and if they catch that old man and hang him, as they will—then—don't you see?"

"How can you—oh, my God, Lizzie! How can you be so mean?"

He got up and started to go. Then he turned.

"Lift your finger and I'll come to help you through this."

"Thank you," she answered. "I've thought that I was standing alone in the world often and often before this hour. But now—now I am alone and shall find what it means. And, since he had to die, I'm glad—I'm glad, I tell you, to be alone. For life's given me the chance to know myself—such a chance as never a woman had yet. I'll see him into his grave and weep myself blind for him. That I'll do and then—then——"

She broke off and smiled, while he went out haunted by her look for ever.

The coroner's jury brought in a verdict of murder against persons unknown and, having

regard for her blood-stained clothes, Elisabeth was detained in custody while the police made inquiries.

For three days she remained at Okehampton and was then liberated—to learn that her husband had been arrested on suspicion.

CHAPTER XXXVI

DURING THE SILENT HOURS in which she was withdrawn from the world, Elisabeth Trevail had leisure to consider the past and determine her actions in the future. She welcomed the enforced peace, and did not fear the attitude of the people when she returned among them.

Grief paid a heavy visitation, but between the intervals of anguish and vain regret she weighed the meaning of her life and balanced its good and evil. First she thought upon Dunning and again saw herself standing with the Vallances at his grave. A mob attended the funeral, but none came, save from curiosity, excepting herself and his two old attendants. She was his widow in every moral sense, and she clung to the idea and won a sort of consolation from it. He died intestate and his goods passed into the hands of strangers. As for her, she had directed that her clothes and a few personal possessions should be sent from North Combe to Clannaboro'.

And now she reviewed life and measured the influence of two men on her own existence and her influence on theirs. The closed chapter of Dunning's days first occupied her and she saw with vivid clarity all that he had meant to her. She associated him with the Beacon as a tonic, a potent energy, a drastic, dynamic agent. Indeed

she confused his force with the Beacon's. He had been the incarnation of the heath and granite under certain of its moods. His effect had been salutary, sane and harsh. She had lost as well as won from contact with him; but she had won more than she had lost. She loved him better, now that he was dead, than she had loved him living. The rational process of thought appeared to be reversed with her at this juncture and she felt not sorry for herself that Dunning was dead, but sorry for him. Such sorrow he would have been the first to mock. His familiar motto was to call no man lucky until he was dead. Yet she remembered his exultation and lover-like worship in the last moment that they had stood together. She remembered how he seemed to grow younger under her eyes; how the joy of life thus suddenly within his reach softened the very lines of his face. She wasted hours in speculating as to the probable course of their united lives if he had lived. And, as often as she did so, the woman caught herself up, smothered her tears and turned impatiently to the real future.

Yet even in her fervent moments, when the dead seemed to live again and she saw him in the darkness, Elisabeth felt that more for a principle than for a man had she deserted Charles Trevail. She knew it, but understood the absurdity of expecting any other creature to believe it. She had no excuses to offer for the past; indeed the idea of an excuse entered not her thoughts. She knew, however, that her husband would make excuses for her, because it was his nature to do so for all mistaken and erring things; but they had finished with one another now, and it was subjectively alone that she considered him.

She felt proud of what he had sacrificed for her. She did not dwell upon the fact that, had Charlie told her of his business with his uncle instead of hiding it, she would be his wife still. For her that was as nothing beside the reality of the thing that Trevail had done. When, as she supposed, all was lost, all had been gained. Defeat was turned into victory; her influence and his love had triumphed over his character, lifted him above it, and performed a miracle.

She was shaken as she worked out these ideas, for they meant much to her. They gave the lie to the dead; they seemed to contradict Dunning's prophecies that no man could rise above himself; they shattered Elisabeth's own sorrowful conclusions. The thing declared impossible had happened: for love, this man had done a deed, mighty and heroic, when considered in connection with the attributes of his character. Her maiden dreams and hopes had come true. The ideal vision, long since shattered by communion with Dunning and with life, trembled back upon her heart out of the darkness, like a rainbow declared fitfully upon passages of storm. But it persisted now—the sole light in her gloom. It was a gracious thing to feel that from this welter of tribulation one at least had struggled free and emerged stronger, wiser, better armed to fight the battle ahead of him. She dwelt on her past years with Charlie, and began to trace, like a thread of gold through the uneven texture of their married life, the thing that saved him at the last. But she had not seen it in time; she had not perceived how his love had struggled on and persisted against every obstacle; that in

truth and despite of all, she had been his beacon through the darkest night.

She confessed to herself that Trevail's love was cast in a far grander pattern than her own. She had loved herself better than her husband; she had put her self-respect and ambition and sense of obligation to her own character higher than him. His canine patience and faithfulness had wearied her, because his protestations had appeared to be unequal to her tests. But now he had risen in might and done a great thing; and it was her punishment that he had done it too late. She was justly treated.

She wondered what Trevail would do with his future life, now that the sacrifice was vain. She planned his future in thought and guessed that he might even atone to his uncle—supposing that Pike were not convicted of the crime. For how could Trevail—now that the reed on which he had leant had broken and pierced him thus—believe any further in its value? His love must of a surety turn to hate at last; and yet she knew that would not happen, for, gifted though he might be as a lover, her husband lacked power to hate. She guessed that a period of acute torment would dull gradually into indifference, as time blunted his memory. He would drag out certain length of days, and then another woman would enter his life and recompense him and reawaken his power of loving. So she planned his future—still under-valuing him. But she could not deny herself the task of measuring her own influence upon his subsequent days. Think of her as he might, Trevail must bear her imprint to the grave, her mark upon his soul for evermore; and his soul would be

indeed the sadder, but also, perhaps, the stronger for it.

She sickened before she was liberated, because her own soul, that had interested her so profoundly, was now hateful to her. Yet she brimmed with vitality, and sorrow could not lessen that. She wanted to begin living again. She craved for time to pass and her new life to open. She longed to plunge back to work, to toil from dawn till night without ceasing and so tame her body by drudgery. Her purpose was to live in complete isolation so far as she could do so. She shuddered at the thought of trying to influence any living thing again.

At more peaceful moments she became introspective and measured the depth of the mark these men had made on her. At first it appeared that her husband had left no impression and that the changes were due to Dunning alone. But she found that, whatever might have been the failure of Trevail in the past, he had influenced her mightily in the present and probably taught her the most valuable thing that she had learned. Now that they were separated for ever, she began to entertain a respect for him unknown until now. She began to wonder what expression would sit on the faces of Zeal when she returned among them for some few brief days before departing.

Her thoughts drifted to the Beacon then. She anticipated the parting from it and felt not surprised to find that, since Dunning's death, the hill was only a mighty grief to her. That discovery opened deep places of sorrow. Could it be that she had confused him with the hill and credited stones with sermons that came in truth from a human heart? The Beacon's joy was

gone from her, like a morning cloud, and only its torment remained. It had been a delusion and a shadow, had come between her and a fellow-soul; had deceived her in some sort and appropriated what was a man's. The thing in itself now seemed as nought; its spirit had passed from it, and a barren pile of earth, lifted against the sky and tortured by storm, was all that remained. Its magic had passed out of it; its romance was dead; the stories she had woven around it were untrue; the misty people that she had dreamed of now vanished in this grey morning light of reality. She hated the great hill because it seemed to be trying to rob the dead man of his due. Then she felt a frantic wish that he might have been buried on the top of it; and then, again, she recollected that Cosdon's crown was sacred to Trevail.

Facts soon bruised her at every turn. They liberated her and she returned instantly to Clannaboro'; but the house was shut against her and a strange man bade her depart.

"'Tis an ill wind blows none good," he said. "I'm the cousin of this dead chap and all that he had be mine. But there's plenty depend upon me. Anyway there's nothing here for you—you understand that?"

"Yes, I understand," she said. "I'll send for my things this evening."

"They're waiting. 'Tis all going to be sold. I've got no use for Clannaboro'. Well, I'll wish you good-day."

She turned to go and he spoke again.

"You can take a momentum of the man if you like—a pocket-knife or some trifle like that. He had but few goods."

"Thank you—'tis kindly meant. But I don't want anything."

Elisabeth considered for a while what she should do, and then she sought the home of Fanny Cann. The huge bulk of the old woman filled her cottage door and it quivered from crown to heel before the vision of the visitor.

"Good powers—you!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Miss Cann. I don't know how you feel to me, but I know how the rest do. Can you put me up for two nights—or even three? I've got a good few matters to arrange before I go."

"If there's one creature here that ought to cold-shoulder you, I am that creature," said Fanny. "Dragging woman in the dirt like this!"

"Dreadful things have fallen out; but those that are alive have got to go on living. 'Twas no act of mine that slew Reynold Dunning, and if I could have saved him I should have."

Then Fanny bade Elisabeth enter, and presently explained to her what she had not yet learned.

"Charlie's locked up, and 'twill take him all his time to explain that night."

"Is Abraham Pike locked up?" she asked.

"No. They went for him too; but he proved he couldn't have been there. Of course everybody to Zeal knows Charlie didn't do it and Pike did."

"There's not a doubt who did it."

"But the wrong men have hung before and may again. The law don't take character into account. It ain't got no time to do that. You'll have worked pretty fair all-round havoc, Elisabeth Trevail, if they send Charlie after the other."

"I've told the truth about it."

"I know that, else I wouldn't ask you in here. The naked truth you told; and, knowing you, I know you did. And being as I am I understand the story. In fact it has fallen out much as I promised it would when you took Charles. You done what you thought was right and I'm not going to cast a stone. You've had your dose of men now anyway—and they've had their dose of you."

"I'll go and send a cart from the village for my boxes," said the younger. "Then I'll come back. Don't you put yourself about. I'll sleep on the parlour sofa."

"You needn't trouble as to that," answered Fanny. "My bed's big enough for us both."

CHAPTER XXXVII

FEW SUBJECTS were discussed in Zeal at this season but the murder of Reynold Dunning, and it happened that legal presumption and local knowledge arrived at different conclusions respecting the criminal.

Both Charles Trevail and his uncle were arrested on suspicion; but the latter was able to offer proofs of his non-complicity which satisfied the court, while the former had not been able to do so and was committed to the Assizes. Zeal, from personal knowledge of the man, flouted this situation, and the general opinion was fairly presented night after night in the bar of the Oxenham Arms.

"You can sum it in a word," declared Lucky Madders for the benefit of a stranger. "We know the men as men; but in the Law's eyes they be only equal living creatures, with like power to evil. And the Law, finding that they'd both got a big crow to pluck with the chap now in his grave—the Law says 'Either of these men may have committed murder.' But us here, being higher than the Law in knowledge of the culprits, know that one man wasn't built to take a human life, whereas the other one very well might do it. But the Law, having no regard for persons, and still less for the inner nature of men,

have decided that Pike couldn't have done it and that Trevail might. Whereas we in this bar know, to a man, that 'tis Trevail couldn't have done it and Pike might. Do I put the case fair before this foreigner, neighbours?"

"You're fair to the case, but not fair to the Law," declared Mr. Jope. "The case is as you say; but you mustn't blame the Law for not looking under the surface of facts. If it set to work to worm out the inner nature of each man or woman as come to be haled afore it, the work would never be done and for every ten judges we've got now we'd want a hundred. As 'tis, the delay of the Law is a byword. On the face of things the Law have acted wisely. The man is slain, and him first thought to have done it is known to have been in this bar drinking gin at the very moment when, so far as we can tell, Dunning was being struck down. There's a large doubt if he could have killed Dunning and come here after. 'Tis true none know the truth but himself, since he lives and goes his ways alone. But what the Law says is this, 'The man must have the benefit of the doubt'; and the Law holds that Dunning didn't die till after Pike came into this bar. But in the case of Trevail, the time, so far as they can judge, fits in very nice, and human nature being what it is, the Law says that he played a very common part and killed Reynold well inside the ways of human nature. But that's where our knowledge of Trevail comes in and we know that he could no more hammer in a man's head bones than he could shift Cosdon Beacon. That's what we know and the Law don't. But with t'other, though the Law be satisfied that he was in this bar afore Dunning died, we, that

understand him and his rash and fierce nature, would bet a week's wages that he was not."

"To say it without prejudice. You must add the words 'without prejudice,'" declared Neddy Knapman, "else you may get within the clutch of the Law yourself."

"Certainly," continued the shoemaker. "There's none can say, whether in the Law or out, that I'm a man of prejudice. I leave such small things to small natures. 'Iron' Pike's an Old Testament man and goeth by the Five Books. He belongs to a time before Christ, so to say, and it ban't his way when smote on one cheek to offer t'other."

Pike himself entered at this moment.

He had savagely resented incarceration and as savagely rejoiced in the death of his enemy. He declared that some secret foe must have destroyed Dunning; and he openly asserted that his nephew's wife knew more about it than she pretended to know.

They returned now to the theme and Trevail's uncle repeated what Joep had already said.

"The fools are blind. If I had my way, I'd screw the truth out of that woman if I had to tear her fingers and toes off afore she'd squeak. She knows who 'twas—so like as not she helped—but Charles—Charles—be he the fashion of man to kill anything?"

"'Twill go hard with him all the same," answered Underhill. "I've had some speech with the inspector and others, and they say that Charles can't prove he didn't do it, and the only question is whether the Law can prove he did. You know what the police are. They've got to make their living, like the rest of us, and to catch

a murderer is remembered in their favour. If there was anybody else, I'm sure they'd sooner hang him than Charles—and they'd have sooner hanged you, if they could, as you know. But you was one too many for them. And I'm sure we all hope that Charles will be."

"Are you going to help him with a chap to fight the Law for him at 'sizes?" asked Neddy Knapman; but Pike scoffed.

"What fools you be! Do'e think the Law will string him up without a jot of evidence? 'Twill very soon be shown as he had no hand in it."

"Be you going to get the quarry again?"

"Yes, I be. That wretch have taken his silly secret to hell with him, whatever 'twas, and there's none to come between me and the quarry no more."

"You always said 'twould be death for the man that did; and you was right, sure enough," said Lucky.

His master looked at him.

"Have a care," he said. "My ear is quick to catch two meanings when people talk now."

"The Law have ordained that you had no hand in it, and there's an end," declared Mr. Joep. "The Law's white-washed you, and 'tis very certain nobody be going to say that you did it."

"I suppose you want your nephew to get off, however, Mr. Pike?" asked Emma Underhill from behind the bar.

"Yes, I do—or any other man that hadn't done it. I want him to get off, because he's innocent, and I'd want him to get off more still if he was guilty."

"'Tis all or none in these cases," explained the shoemaker. "A man up for murder gets free

again or gets hanged. True, sometimes they'll split the difference and give him penal servitude for life, which the Law seems to reckon the happy medium betwixt freedom and death. And seeing 'twas Charlie's wife threw him over, if there's a majority of married men in the jury, they may take the Law in their own hands. A judge is powerless afore a jury; and though law-learned judges have been known to writhe under a jury's common sense, yet life or death lies with the twelve, not the one."

"Somehow I can't see Charlie on the drop," mused Neddy Knapman. "We've all of us met men very well suited to it; but not him."

"And what shall you do, as the man's uncle, if it comes to that?" asked Underhill.

Pike grunted.

"Because a fool axes questions, a wise man ban't bound to answer 'em," he said. "His whole life stands afore the world to witness this was no deed of his doing. There's none in this place but would go bail for him—none but me. I won't; but that's the man's own fault. He threw me over afore his wife threw him over. He's nought to me no more."

But Pike wavered in his speech and less than his usual ferocity marked it.

It was a strange atmosphere that this man created now, for perhaps none in his presence but knew with moral certainty that he was the murderer. Indeed a sort of unconscious revulsion spread like a chill mist among them. When he went out, they agreed among themselves that they would fling him over.

"'Tis in the air of him—death," said Mr. Madders. "You smell it when he's up along side

of you. For my part I'll think twice afore I work under him again—if they put away his nephew. There's something bad to him—his eyes make me go goose-flesh down the spine."

"And he knows that we know," declared the subtle Knapman. "He knows that we see through it. The beast in him be glad, but the man in him will get back on him now. He knows that he has damned himself and he'll suffer hell if they hang Charlie. For my part I wish we were in America, because there they'd take Pike and march him under the first sizable tree and hang him."

"To hang up the man would be a resounding feat," said Lucky. "I wonder how many of us 'twould take to do it!"

"'Twill be easier to send him to Coventry," decided Underhill; "and I'll take the lead and tell him next time he comes in my bar that I don't want him here no more."

They decided one and all henceforth to treat Pike as though he did not exist.

"Us'll pass the man, just as though he was naked air," said Knapman. "Us'll look through him at the hedge. And when he curses and raves, we'll pretend to hear nought and feel nought."

"Have a care lest he strike, however," warned Mr. Joep. "For he hits cruel hard and cruel sudden, and not the best amongst us could pretend he felt nought if he was down on his stern in the high-road with a broken nose."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ELISABETH OBTAINED PERMISSION to see her husband. He was awaiting trial and, as time proceeded, the lot of the innocent in like case fell upon him. From an attitude of impatient indifference at this reverse and a conviction of security, he lost courage, grew anxious and began to feel despondent.

At first it was not so; at first the minor misfortune of imprisonment looked small beside the shattered life that faced him afterwards. He would presently be free again; but to what purpose? He considered the future, with his wife gone for ever and his uncle turned from him. The latter fact troubled him little, and, since all would be changed, it was well that he should begin again. He imagined himself a labourer working for hire; and he was sorry for himself, until he remembered that he had always been a labourer working for hire. He considered his forthcoming freedom and wondered what his wife would do. He determined to share his savings with her.

With passage of time and beneath the withering ordeal of imprisonment his attitude changed. He forgave Lizzie and began to make excuses for her. He retraced the ground already travelled

in their last interview and he told himself that despair had driven her from him.

When his wife came to see him he could tell her that the past must be buried between them.

"I've thought it through and through," he said. "I've got no doubts left. I've seen the past, as clearly as mortal man could see it, and I've walked each step of our way. Hand in hand always, Lizzie; but 'twas you that was for ever pulling forward and I for ever dragging back. I was a sled on the wheel. You're to blame too, for taking other counsel so willingly; but I'm most to blame. And then, when you had won, and I started to go to uncle and throw him over, I just lacked a pinch of something to tell you before I went, but decided, instead, to tell you when I came back."

"I know, I know, Charlie. Leave all that now. We can't change it. I haven't come about the past. When I think of it, my brain shakes. We must keep it out of our minds for ever, if we want to be useful in the world. You've forgiven me, and that's as big a thing as giving up your uncle was. And if you hadn't, I doubt I could have gone on living. But you've forgiven me and that's my new starting-point. And you—how is it now? I want to know when they are going to set you free?"

"Perhaps they won't. It all looked absurd—to think anybody who knows me would suppose I could kill a man; but now it don't look so absurd as it did apparently. Anyway my lawyer makes a devil of a fuss about it, and he's got so serious of late that I begin to feel the same. Being chained up here knocks my nerve to pieces. The point is that many a husband would have done it.

In fact, I was more provoked to kill Dunning than the old man was, because a wife be a mightier matter than a quarry whether or no. But, of course, there's no question about it. Only against that, uncle has proved, so clear as can be, that he must have been at the Oxenham Arms at the moment when Dunning was being killed; while I can't prove nothing, except that I was out of my house roaming about, God knows where, at that hour. To the best of my memory I never went further than the stream side in the valley and not within a mile of Clannaboro', but the Law——"

"They can prove nothing."

"Nothing, and if the jury brought it home guilty, they wouldn't hang me. So lawyer says. But 't isn't all over by a long way. I may go to prison for it."

She considered and he spoke again.

"And if I do, Lizzie? Oh, Lizzie, if I do—for years?"

"Don't think it. 'Twill never happen."

"You, Lizzie—you. I've thought deep through these cruel days. You say I forgive you; but do you forgive me? Yes, I've reached the point of asking that."

"Don't," she said. "Don't put things upside down so."

"There's two sides to all questions. And I say again there's two sides to this. Forgive me for not telling you what I was going to do. Look here, Lizzie, in a word, if I get out of this scot free—will you, will you come back to me?"

"Would you take me back?"

"'Tis fitting and reasonable and the proper thing every way."

She shook her head.

"No, no, no, Charlie."

"He never had you?"

She sighed.

"Poor Charlie," she said. "No—not that. He only had my soul."

"None can lay hands on another's soul, Lizzie. We're clay and fire—we're clay and fire, I say, but none can meddle with another's fire."

She stared at his simplicity.

"Poor Charlie," she said again, almost to herself.

"Come back to me! Come back to me! You love me; you do, you do, Lizzie. You loved me when you heard I'd flung the old man over."

His childish attitude showed the gulf that still yawned between them. Never before had she so felt it. That he might secretly want her back, she guessed; but that he could already cry out to her thus, before one single wound had ceased to torture, amazed her.

She told herself that she could never go back.

"Don't think of it; don't dream of it," she said. "You're weak and run down—as well you may be cooped up here. If you could take me back, Charlie, I should feel, after all, I'd done nothing for you. And I want to feel that, though I've wrecked myself on it, I haven't wrecked you. Be strong still, and don't feel less than what you ought to feel against me; don't feel less than what I should have felt against you, if it had been the other way."

"You can't love me no more then?"

"More than ever I did," she assured him, "but we mustn't talk of such things. It's not worthy

of us. I feel vile even to say I care for you now—vile and false to dead and living both.”

“It’s all one to me then. I hope they’ll hang me. If you won’t come back, I’m very like to plead guilty,” he said.

“You’re broken and down, and well you may be,” she answered. “But look at the real cause of all your suffering and don’t be weak. I meant well by you; but I did fearful evil. I know it now and you must keep that in your mind. The children flung stones and the women at a door or two spat in the road when I went down Zeal two days ago. Miss Cann says that I’d have been whipped round the bounds of the village tied to a cart-tail in her grandmother’s time. I deserve that.”

“If I was out of this——”

But the interview ended and Elisabeth learned that she must depart.

“They’ll let me see you again before you go up to Exeter, Charlie,” she said. “And don’t fret, and don’t think about me. Be clean, and when you get free, keep free.”

She rose to leave him.

“Where are you biding for the minute?” he asked.

“With Miss Cann.”

“And where are you going now?”

“To see your uncle. The thought’s just flashed into my mind to do it.”

“For God’s sake, don’t! ’Tis another trouble added to the rest if I’m to picture you facing him.”

“No call to fear for me,” she answered and so left him.

They had spoken in whispers, and the police-

man present at the interview made no effort to overhear them.

Elisabeth kept her word and visited Abraham Pike during the evening of that day. She believed that some element of danger might lurk in the action, but welcomed it. Danger was tonic at this juncture and she cared little for the promise of life. It occurred to her that by seeing Pike and speaking fearlessly with him, she might be of service to her husband. Moreover the adventure chimed with her own inclination and mood.

It was dark when she reached the miser's granite house. She knocked, and he opened the door himself.

"Good-evening, Uncle Pike," she said. "Can you spare me a bit of your time?"

They had not met for many weeks, and he started violently at sound of her voice, put his face close to hers and peered into it.

"Time—time!" he answered. "You've played with your time and other people's time enough, you scarlet wretch! And you come to me—now! Do you want me to shorten your time?"

"That's little matter. We're past all that. You never frightened me, even in the old days, and you never will."

He retreated and she followed him.

"You're playing with fire to come in here," he said.

"Very like, but do you think I'd mind if you treated me like you treated Dunning? There's no need for lies between us. You're safe enough, if you want to be safe, and I can't harm you if I would. And I've no wish to. I've done good and harm in this place—harm to you and the man you killed—good to Charlie."

"You say that—and the man's neck in a halter!"

"That's your work, not mine. I've lifted him; I've torn him away from you. He'll never go back now."

She sat down in the kitchen. There was a single candle burning on the table and by it some bread, some dripping on a plate, and a Bible.

"I didn't count on this visit—luckily for you—or I might have been ready for you—with a hole digged in the garden," he said.

"Dig it—I can wait," she answered. "D'you think I'd have come into your den if I minded what you might do to me? Just let me go over my life, and then you'll see how I stand. I'm here defenceless and care not if I never go again."

She hastily sketched her days at Zeal and he listened and comprehended.

"My work in life—the one thing that I toiled and laboured for after I married Charlie—was to lift him higher and make him see that your way was bad. I thought I'd failed; I thought he'd gone to you from me for good and all; and so I left him for good and all. Not till too late did I know the truth of what he'd done. And then—see how it struck. His great deed of throwing you over was the last straw on your back, and, little thinking how you'd settle both your enemies at one blow, you killed Dunning."

"If I'd known you was there, nought on God's earth would have saved you."

"But if I'd known you was there, I might have saved you and him too," she answered.

Thus he explicitly confessed his crime; but her heart did not beat the faster for it. She was only interested to find that she angered him so little.

He sat scowling upon her; but he threatened no violence.

"'Twas my work that killed poor Reynold, though I've denied it to myself," she continued. "Your hand, but my work. D'you see how much I've done in this place? D'you see what deadly pranks a woman can play with men? All my work. You wouldn't have killed Dunning if I hadn't got Charlie away from you. You had to strike hard and heavy after that, and you were madder than ever before and you went there and then——"

"You talk of killing like a maiden talks of marriage," he said. "Let only them as have killed talk of killing."

He panted and walked about the room.

"There's little you can tell me I don't know," she answered. "While I was mewed in his bedroom, and afore I'd had time to look round, you'd come and finished him and gone again. I'm glad now—for his sake. The hope of me and the winning of me were better things—far better things for him than I myself would ever have been. I never was very sorry for him."

"Listen," he said. "I be terrible anxious to hear how it sounds spoken aloud. You're right: I wasn't with the man two minutes all told. I found him alone and he greeted me like a friend instead of an enemy. I'd ridden, you must know—they never thought I might have done that. But I had—hell for leather when Charlie left me. I thought of you first; then I fastened on him. Terribly friendly he was—as victorious men can afford to be—and well he might be, for he'd done us all round, you see—got my quarry and you in his bedroom. I must have a drink with him,

and he turned and went to the cupboard. 'Twas all over in a moment. He had his back against me and his arm up to fetch down a bottle. A little coal-hammer I took with me. And I hit him twice. The first dropped him and the second went through his head bones. I heard 'em scrunch, like an egg-shell. Then I dragged him under the table and was gone. I guessed his people—they Vallances—couldn't be far off, for I didn't know they was away; and though when I went to kill the man, I cared not a jot whether the whole parish saw me do it, yet, when he dropped so quick and secret and none knowed, there came a mighty keen hope that none ever might know. The quarry—the quarry—the quarry, I tell you, was in my thoughts. Lost and found again. So I walked my pony over the grass to the gate and crept off, and had the clever thought to go in a field of mine and turn him loose there and then walk in the bar of the Arms. I was drinking in less than fifteen minutes after I left Clannaboro', and you didn't come down and find the dead man for an hour. That's how it fell out. I'm safe enough, you see."

"Yes," she said. "You're safer than your nephew is."

He did not answer.

"How d'you feel about it?" she asked. "Is it all they say to kill a man?"

"When it comes over me, I think on him. I think of his ways and what he did against me and how he tormented me and robbed me and made me a scorn among the people. To kill a man is a great thing and not a good thing; but the instrument's nought. The hand of God smote him—I'll cleave to that."

Nevertheless she saw that a new emotion had come into his life.

"You're frightened of what you've done," she said. "I never would have expected that to have happened to you. I'm not frightened, but I'm haunted. What is it frightens you—that they will find it out?"

He shook his head.

"I'm feared for Charlie."

"I've come about that."

"They wouldn't hang him, mind you. 'Twas never known, lawyer says, that a man was hanged on such a case. And, even if it could be brought nearer to him——"

"Suppose Charlie was to say he'd done it?"

"Say he'd done it!"

"He threatened to do that this morning. I was allowed to see him for half an hour."

"Say he'd done it! Good God, he don't want to be shut up for his life!"

"He's like you and me. He's not very sweet on his life just now. D'you know the size of his heart? I thought I did; but even I didn't. He asked me to go back to him if they let him free!"

"Now I know what you be come to me for."

"No, you don't. I'll never go back to him."

"And hearing that he'll say he killed Dunning? 'Tis your aim and hope to have 'em both in the pit yet?"

"Why don't you finish what you've begun and kill me too?" she asked. "I'll help you. Then Charlie's free every way."

"Kill yourself," he said. "You've taught us all a hell of a lot; now larn a bit. You think you've done him good and lifted him up. If you've done

him good, God defend them that suffer evil from you. Your work's finished here, and if you want to round it and complete the job, go out of it. Drown yourself, poison yourself, cut your throat, jump in my quarry. He wants you back; but you'd gone to t'other, and even you have your pride, it seems, and won't sink to slink back to the man you've horned. But so long as you're alive, the drivelling fool will hanker for you and you'll go on wrecking him. So die and be damned, and then, once you're underground, he may be a man yet."

She looked at him without speaking and he lifted the candle and peered searchingly into her face.

"Ah!" he said; "it's marked you too, I see. You be white as curds and your eyes look out of black rings. You're done for—you'll never be fair to see again. You round the job and set the man free."

"D'you think I haven't thought of it?"

"Bah! Thought of it! You, with your boasted pluck and strength—stronger and wiser than all us men together—can't do that. Your blasted life be done—you've sucked two men dry and now—come to me to kill you. Practise what you've drove two men mad by preaching. So get out of it and leave him free to find another!"

"If that was all he had to find," she said.

"Kill yourself—kill yourself—kill yourself," he repeated. "Be you afeared? I ban't. If I was you, I'd knife myself so soon as a pig. 'Tis made too much of, I tell you. When Dunning dropped, he was grinning; and grinning he died. Grinning he lived and grinning he died."

Elisabeth rose and left him then. She walked to the door and he followed her.

The candle that he carried threw a shadow, and looking round suddenly she found his arm lifted above her head.

"I was only thinking how easy it would be; but easier for you than for me."

She went out. The road was empty and the hour was late.

"Grinning he lived—grinning he died!" shouted the man into the silence after her.

She returned to the cottage of Miss Cann, but said nothing of what had passed, or where she had been.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE UPHEAVAL in the mind of Abraham Pike begat strange issues and from a small beginning broke up the deep springs of his nature and laid the fabric waste. He began to endure pain from the course of events. His constricted mind was in labour and suffered terrific transitions. Ever in extremes, his ferocity turned now upon himself. He hated his days in one breath and in the next, from a boundless vitality, spurned the thought of ending them; with frantic desire at one moment he longed for his nephew to be free; and in the next he cared not what might become of him. But from this matter there emerged a purpose and a rooted consciousness that life had now given him all that was possible. He reviewed his days, and retraced them through the misty channels of his memory, as a beast might be supposed dimly to glimpse the past. What more could he win out of living? He was old; he had conquered and slain his enemy. The quarry was to be his again. He missed Dunning and that keen edge the other had put to his life. No dread goaded him; he had welcomed dread as an emotion mordant and acute. For himself he cared nothing, and the ease with which he had accomplished his purpose and continued to go free in the heart of a suspecting

community made him forget how differently the crime and its sequel might have fallen out. He felt a large contempt for his fellow-man. His immature mind had been lit up by murder. The deed exercised a distinct functional effect and increased the clearness of his intellect.

He was largely occupied with the problem of Charles Trevail and once even thought to see his nephew; but he changed his purpose, for deep uneasiness marked him in the atmosphere of the law.

He despised it, but terribly he dreaded it. The instinct, however, was mechanical and built upon his experience in the far past. For himself at the present juncture, he could not be said to feel any fear. But his alarm for Trevail increased, and he believed that futile law might presently throw the punishment on his nephew's shoulders. He still hated and cared for Trevail in a gust. He could not separate the emotions. The problem was urgent, because the trial approached. Had it been possible easily to save his nephew he would have done so; but time progressed; other matters cleared themselves; his life, as a tale recorded, resolved into a jejune and flat experience—into an anti-climax that promised no change for the better, no further flavours, and no more large events. To be hanged, indeed, was in his power; but he might do that for himself without help of man.

He began to occupy himself with his possessions and, for a time, thought upon them weakened his purpose. He linked himself up with the world again, saw Trevail's lawyer and considered Trevail's wife. He heartily wished that Elisabeth would destroy herself and wondered whether the

matter was in her mind. Then he did what before he had not done: he strove to see how the thing that he thought to do would affect his world; he endeavoured to picture, to the last ripple, the wave cast up by his contemplated plunge. He devised how to leave his money away from Charles, yet knew none who might better possess it. Then he was inspired to take it with him. The possibility of this, once proved, gave him large satisfaction. There lacked time to realise all his goods; but some wealth might be banished from the earth for ever when he left it. This discovery accelerated his movements. He collected a large sum of money under his roof in cash. The accumulations of years he sold and emptied the chamber of his house where he had kept them. Suspicions were rife that he was about to run from Zeal and the folk guessed that he would soon be seen no more.

Pike received a summons to attend the Assizes and bear witness of his nephew's visit to him on the night of the murder. He inquired concerning the train and learned that he must start for Exeter at an early hour. He forgot nothing and bargained over the sale of his possessions as of old. He smarted, too, by instinct when the prices were lower than he had hoped. He turned his money into notes, and one night, sitting alone, he burned fifty pounds—to taste the emotion engendered.

He went fishing one day and then remembered that his boat was of value. Therefore he sold this also, and a man, who owned a pond one mile distant, was glad to purchase it. A day was fixed and Pike undertook the transit of the punt to its destination.

There came a night when Lucky Madders and the rest of the men and boys who worked at the quarry were bidden to call at the house of their master.

Greatly wondering what he might have to say to them, they came. They found him in his kitchen clad in his Sunday suit. He dismissed them and gave each a month's wages. He explained that he was going to the Assizes on the following morning and should stop at Exeter until Trevail's fate was determined. He added that his future movements were uncertain and would depend on the result of the trial. Then he bade all depart save Madders and one other.

To their ears he told another story: the true one. In a hundred sledge-hammer words he explained how he had killed Reynold Dunning; how he had ridden swiftly away from Clannaboro' the moment afterwards; how, owing to the fact that Elisabeth Trevail did not discover the dead until an hour later than his departure, it was within his power apparently to prove an explicit alibi.

"Remember that I came in the bar of the Arms and drank and raged against my nephew," he said.

Having made all clear, he bade Madders proclaim it and fetch officers to arrest him.

"They'll quickly come," he declared. "All men know that I killed Dunning, though none can prove it but me. Now begone and tell them and lead 'em here."

They left him, and after lengthy speech obeyed him. His companion supposed that Pike would await the police; Mr. Madders did not.

"He chose us two old blids," he said, "because

he knew that we couldn't grapple with him and keep his hands off himself; but that's his meaning. He's going out of it and Charlie Trevail will be cleared. You mark me, he'll be a deader long afore the constables get to his house."

Twenty minutes later it was attempted to arrest Abraham Pike; but his place proved empty and, in the darkness of night, none could tell or guess which way he had gone.

A policeman knew something of his affairs.

"'Twas on the cards that he might have been took again to-morrow at Exeter," he said. "Us have been watching very close to see what he meant to do. He's sold everything that he could sell—even to this house. He's got very near three thousand pounds of money in his pocket at this moment no doubt."

"Maybe he'll turn up in Exeter as ordained," suggested Lucky. "Such a fantastic man as him may have planned to rise up in court and tell the judge."

They talked into the night but instituted no search until the morrow.

And Pike meanwhile had departed towards North Combe and the quarry. The night was dark, but he moved swiftly with the gait of one well used to night. He hastened under the wood to the little tarn and approached his punt. With the merciful swiftness of an executioner, he carried out the details and his expedition was extreme. He cast off the chain, loaded the boat with some heavy stones, until it sank gunwale deep in the still water, and then paddled slowly to a familiar spot in the middle of the lake. Now he took the chain that usually moored his craft and

bound it tightly about his own body, so that he should be firmly fastened to the bottom of the punt. One arm alone remained free and, seizing his oar, he smote the planking under him and drove it in.

His last act was to feel for his money, which he had sewn into the pocket of his coat.

Thus did he pass after his enemy and their recalcitrant forces destroy one another.

CHAPTER XL

CHARLES TREVAIL spoke with Fanny Cann, and he desired one thing and she advised another. But the question between them depended for the answer upon a third person and she had determined what to do.

When Trevail was freed, he came instantly to his home and desired to see his wife; but she would not see him. She remained for one more day at Miss Cann's cottage, and then she left the place and proposed never more to return. Trevail was making a final struggle for happiness. Though free again, his freedom seemed of little worth and life threatened to submerge him for ever in a chill twilight.

He spoke passionately to the old woman.

"Why, why won't she come back? I've done all I could do. I've——"

"Ban't what you've done, Charlie; 'tis what she's done. You must give her credit for common decency. Things such as these can't happen and be forgot, like yesterday's shower of rain."

"That's all over and I've a perfect right to forget if I choose. We have our lives clear ahead. Ban't I never to know what happiness means after working so terrible hard for it? Didn't I fairly earn it? She knows that well enough. I'm

broken, and I'm broken in; I'm changed; I'm good enough for her now; and I know that if I'd done what I did do one day sooner, she'd never have left me. Therefore why should she leave me now? Am I to lose all—after I thought to have won all? Am I a dumb beast, to be tormented and over-driven till I drop? Haven't I had enough? I'm changed to the very roots: tell her that. My desire for joy and lazy leisure be dead. They were natural to me; but they're dead now. Everything is dead but what she wants to live. I'll fling over the joy of life, like dross, for her sake—everything—everything for her sake. If she leaves me now is it fair, is it just?"

"Don't you take on, but list to me. Here's a matter for time to work at."

"If she goes, she'll never come back—I know that well enough."

"Not here; she'll never come back in sight of Cosdon Beacon, and who shall blame her? But 'tis for you to plot and plan, not me. She's broken down in body and soul, and she must get away alone to cleanse herself. That was her own word. She came pretty near finishing herself, Charlie. The old man, under water now, advised her to do it, and if he hadn't, 'tis possible I do believe that she might have. Don't you pester her for the moment. Let her go right away and work—work her fingers to the bone. She'll recover; but she won't recover in sight or sound of you. Let her go far ways off, and learn, and get humble and teachable, which she never has been yet; and then may be, once the habit of humble learning comes upon her, she'll change and in time to come learn even from you."

"She'll never come back I tell you—not if once she goes."

"Go she will, and no sane man or woman would wish to keep her. Let her go without any fuss. She's got a great sense of what's fitting. 'Tis a sense most women have and most men have not. She couldn't come back to you now; and God knows 'tis eating my own words even to think or hope she ever will do so. But, all the same, the case being as it is and you being what you are, I believe and hope as you'll come together again. It may happen."

"Then help me to make it."

"Your only chance—your only chance is to let her go free, without any more attempts to stop her or see her. She's ill, but 'tis an illness that will slowly mend once she's out of sight of this place. Let her get away and follow her bent, while you look round and sell North Combe and take up work out of sight of here. You'll do well to get off Dartmoor altogether, I reckon, for your own sake as well as hers. She's had her dose of that. Try the in-country and let her bide alone for a full year—a full year, Charlie—and then see how life looks to her."

"I shall never know where to find her again."

"I know what she means to do. I made her tell me. She's got the old sort of work again in London. And leave her to it. She said yester-night that she'd done what she wanted to do for you; but she didn't feel just then the result of it; she didn't think what it would be if you did what you wanted to do for her. Such twisted tangles between a man and a woman be beyond me of course—'tis like the pink dodder choked in

a fuzz bush to see most women's lives messed up by going to live with a man. But as to your case I won't say that exactly. If she's the dodder and you're the fuzz, she haven't choked you to death anyway and you haven't pricked her to death. She've got to know your uses now; but she've also got to know what hard labour tastes like after the easy days at North Combe. She'll go at it like a demon and try to kill herself with work at first. She's in a cruel state and haven't got no opinions and no hopes left. She wants ideas now, not opinions, and she'll never judge man nor mouse again. That's all to the good; and the next thing is what will happen to her mind when she begins to look back. Well, she'll see a live man and a dead one for sartain, and she'll measure up what good and ill she's got and given. And she'll begin to feel what you are and—such as you are, she'll miss you, I suppose. So let her go; and the farther she goes away and the less she hears or sees of you, the more likely she'll be to want to come closer again and to see and hear once more."

"Where is she now?"

"Up over—taking leave of it."

He started to climb the hill.

"Don't you do that!" she cried out; but he only pushed on. He knew that he was wrong; yet no power, short of physical, could then have prevented the man from endeavouring to reach his wife.

"Fool!" shouted Miss Cann after him; and in anger and impatience she went into her house and banged the door.

Trevail tramped the pathless places and sought for Lizzie until it grew dark. He did not see

her; but she saw him far off and hid from him. She returned to Fanny after the night had fallen, but would not enter the house until satisfied that her husband had gone.

The women talked together, though Miss Cann hid her mind and did not speak of the things that had passed between her and Trevail.

"'Tis understood," she said, "that you let me know how you are faring and how life goes on. And, as for Trevail, you'll excuse me for naming him, he's going to be as busy as a bee leaving Zeal and seeking a new place out of sight of Dartmoor."

"We can never forget."

"You may. He won't. A great power of faithfulness without a doubt. Worth a thousand of you in that matter. However, we must help him to forget you since 'tis your wish. We want to pleasure you, Elisabeth. Some of us can still care about you and be sorry for the mess your nature has thrust you into."

"Tell him that my last word was I hope he will fight and fight with himself and not forgive me—never, never."

"I'll tell him. All the same you're doing the very thing to make a silly man forgive you—especially one like him. Finish up your bread and milk and be off to your bed."

CHAPTER XLI

ELISABETH TREVAIL sat in a train that hastened from Okehampton to London. She wore black and her face was very pale. By her nervous motions and unrest it was easy to see that she suffered. The day was dark and rain swept the window of the carriage.

As the train approached Yeoford, she rose, begged pardon of a woman who sat beside the door, bent over her, lowered the glass and leant out.

A man spoke.

"Be careful," he said; "we're not near the station yet."

But she did not hear him. Her eyes were fixed at edge of earth, where a slate-grey mound, washed by leagues of wet air, rose—small and dim—beyond the hills and dales. It persisted in her sight for a moment; then ribbons of steam swept past the train and the vision vanished.

Elisabeth drew up the window and returned to her place.

THE END

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